PRODUCING THE AMERICAN ZOMBIE FILM: A SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF A GENRE

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by
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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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Presented by Todd Platts

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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PRODUCING THE AMERICAN ZOMBIE FILM: A SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF A GENRE

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Abstract

This dissertation integrates three literatures in the sociological epistemology of culture to historiographically document the evolution of zombie cinema from its cinematic genesis in *White Zombie* (1932) to its pyrrhic institutionalization in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). Hitherto, a majority of scholars interested in zombie films, explicitly or implicitly, employ variations of societal reflection orientations to unsheathe the walking dead as "barometer[s] of cultural anxiety" (Dendle 2007: 45). At their best these approaches demonstrate how diachronic constructs of zombies draw from extant cultural anxieties in order to reflect them back to audiences who often seek symbolic resolutions for those concerns. However, this knowledge is gained at the elision of examining both the culture industries responsible for the creation of all cinematic fare (cf. Peterson and Anand 2004) and the internal cultural ecology of zombies that affords rampant re-imaginings of the creatures (cf. Kaufman 2004).

This project, then, explores the convergence of reflectionist understandings, production approaches, and endogenous accounts in the evolution of zombie cinema from 'white' zombies to 'night' zombies by developing three sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954): opportunity space, transition capacity, and endogenous genre ecology. While applied zombie films, the concepts – in their integration of three disparate research traditions – are general in orientation and therefore contribute to the corpus of sociology.

Chapter 1: Toward a Sociology of (Zombie) Film

1.1 Introduction

Most of you can imagine a "typical" zombie film even if you have never seen one. Bodies of the recently dead mysteriously rise from their eternal slumber. Stricken of any presence of their former selves, the reanimated corpses have but one drive, to devour the living. Alone, their diminished physical functioning poses little threat, but soon enough their numbers swell to uncontrollable levels. The living, with society and any hope of salvation disappearing around them, seek refuge in defensible spaces like farmhouses, malls, or military bases. The survivors momentarily ward off the human-hungry cadavers, but their safety is fleeting. The humans' makeshift sanctuaries become dangerous, not because of breeches in the rampart, but because of mounting dissention amongst themselves. Human unity fades as undead unity strengthens. One by one the living join the ranks of the living dead until zombies take over the world.

Fans and scholars of zombies know the "typicalness" of preceding description was not always so typical. My ability to assume the typicalness of the description above demonstrates the influence and centrality that director George Romero wields over the zombie genre. However, Romero's reinvention of zombies occurred, as of this writing, during zombies' cultural midlife. Had I written the same account in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, or even early 1970s – as chapter 8 argues – most of you would not have the faintest idea what I was writing about. Astute science fiction fans (after 1955) may have identified the summary as a variant of Richard Matheson's (1995) vampire novel *I Am Legend*. (For the record, George Romero repeatedly describes *Night of the Living Dead*

(1968) as a rip-off of *I Am Legend* – so those science fiction fans would have been right.) Chances are, if you are reading this, you also know that for decades, popular culture – in the form of novels, journalism, radio, comic books, and especially movies – associated zombies with Haiti and voodoo[1]. You may also know that during the 1950s zombies became swept up alien invasion and nuclear radiation narratives before emerging as flesheating ghouls. You may not know how this transformation took place, and if you do, you probably do not know what it has to do with sociology. And that is my task in the pages to follow: to provide the first sociological account of the "modern" zombie film's emergence. This account, I argue, is of general importance to the sociology of culture. That is, over the proceeding pages I endeavor to explain how, after nearly sixty years of cultural evolution, the cinematic zombie transformed from a tragic figure of Haitian folklife into the flesheating ghoul we know today mostly by arguing against prevailing accounts.

Scholars and popular writers before me have posed the same question and have provided intellectually stimulating and worthwhile answers (for complete historiographical overviews see especially Bishop 2010a, Dendle 2007, McIntosh 2008, Russell 2006). By and large, these authors treat zombie films as allegorical responses to the darkest aspects of the cultural zeitgeist. According to their studies, shifts in output and content in zombie films are identified as symptoms of major psychosocial and sociopolitical currents extant to their production. For example, early zombie films have been read as both a metonym of US colonialism and for the despair and hopelessness that

[1] When describing "voodoo" throughout this study, I am not referring to the actual practice of Vodou – a very serious spirituality that has many positive influences on its adherents and played a pivotal role in Haitian liberation (Hron 2009: 135-184). I use voodoo to acknowledge that filmmakers and other cultural producers misrepresented Vodou in very racist, xenophobic, alarmist, and jingoistic manners.

many Americans experienced during the Great Depression (see for example Bishop 2010a: 37-63, Dendle 2007: 46-48, Russell 2006: 20-27). Moreover, director George A. Romero's pictures have also been seen as symptomatic of social anxieties that were prevalent at the time of their production. Where *Night of the Living Dead* was seen to reflect, among other things, late-1960s racial tensions and the fall of the nuclear family (see Bishop 2010a: 94-128, Dendle 2007: 50), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) was viewed as a critique of consumerism and middle-class conformity (see Bishop 2010b, Dendle 2007: 51). Broader questions are left unanswered by existing literature, however. For instance, with genre understood as relations of orientations, expectations, and conventions binding groups of texts together (see chapter 3), how can we explain zombies' generic diversity? How can we understand zombie films – with all their variety – as a coherent genre, much less a subgenre?[2] How did the zombie make its dramatic transformation? How can we see such different entities as the same creature?

Within prevailing literature, claims concerning the motives and logic behind zombie film production have been made despite the lack of rigorous effort to understand the role of the film industry which through production and distribution practices alters the genre. Where prior investigations of zombies treat the creatures as bearing witness to the mentalité or zeitgeist, I build on a small, but growing, volume of scholarship that probes into the institutional aspects of horror film production (e.g. Doherty 2002; Heffernan 2004; Lobato and Ryan 2011; Nowell 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2012a; Ryan 2010), a literature where investigations of zombie films are still missing (but see O'Brien 2008

[2] Within scholarly literature, zombie films are referred to as both a genre and a subgenre. For reasons of clarity, I will primarily refer to zombie films as a genre. However, when further clarification becomes required, I will occasionally refer zombie cinema as a subgenre. Both terms are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

and Platts forthcoming*b*). While it may be tempting for sociologists to brush zombies aside as irrelevant "pop culture ephemera," I want to suggest that sociologists ignore zombies at their own peril, as zombie inflected popular culture now contributes an estimated $5 billion to the global economy per year (Ogg 2011, Platts forthcoming*a*). Zombies as rendered in films, video games, comic books, and novels resonate with large swaths of consumers and as such warrant sociological analysis. Moreover, sociology – as a discipline designed to unearth the influences of economic, political, institutional, and social forces – is ideally equipped to unsheathe the broader lessons of zombies, and, thus, add to debates in zombie studies (Platts forthcoming*a*). This study unpacks a small part of zombies' sociological story and hints at what they may offer to other subfields of sociology.

Thus, my study, primarily assessing zombie films produced for the American market between 1932 and 1979 when the modern idea of zombie cinema became cemented,[3] attempts to move beyond symptomatic/reflection analyses by examining both the material and cultural conditions involved in the production and continual transformation of the genre. My project of explaining the genesis and trajectory of zombies offers an intriguing sociological puzzle and an important theoretical opportunity, one that affords us the ability to examine how new cultural objects[4] emerge, expand, contract, and change. To achieve this end I integrate three research traditions in the sociology of culture: reflection, production, and endogenous approaches of cultural change. Rather than viewing these traditions as separate epistemological projects, I

[3] By modern idea of zombie cinema, I mean civilization ending zombie narrative discussed at the beginning of this chapter. I also discuss this textual model in more detail in chapter 3.

[4] I use the term cultural object to refer to "socially meaningful expression[s]" "embodied in form" (Griswold 2008: 12). Zombie films are cultural objects in that they tell meaningful stories and are embedded in a complex nexus of social relations.

follow the leads of Harvey Molotch (2005) and Larry Isaac (2009) and argue generic evolution is a joint outcome of endogenous constraints inherent in specific cultural configurations (e.g. zombie films), shifting circumstances of material creation, and the ability of a genre to adapt to broader social currents and inconsistencies in its reception and discourse. I stitch reflection, production, and endogenous approaches together by developing three sensitizing concepts: transition capacity, opportunity space, and endogenous genre ecology. Though specifically applied to zombie films, the terms are general in orientation; and, thus, contribute to the corpus of sociological literature on culture. I spend the remainder of this chapter developing these sensitizing concepts, specifying my data, sources and methods, discussing limitations, and providing brief overviews of the chapters to come.

1.2 Research Traditions: Reflection, Production, and Endogenous Approaches to Culture

As I just noted, three research traditions in the sociology of culture are identified as relevant to my study: 1) reflection orientations, 2) production approaches, and 3) endogenous views. Reflection orientations focus on how the content of cultural products (e.g. films, music, novels) respond to broader social fluctuations such as changes in gender relations, political and civil unrest, war, and so on (Alexander 2003: 21-34). Put simply, practitioners of reflection approaches attempt to map changes in cultural content onto social forces or social change. Sociologist Albert Bergesen (2006: 41-59), for example, argues Don Quixote and John Rambo arose in response to issues of national decline and that both demonstrate a mismatch between the historical ideals of their nation-state and contemporaneous realities therein. Similarly, Andrew Tudor (1989,

1997, 2002) posits that the rise in popularity of certain horror film types (e.g. gothic horror, alien invasion narratives, possession films, teenage slashers) correspond to macrosocial currents in a society – providing accessible documents to divine junctural fears in the process. For good reasons, reflection approaches dominate academic discussions of zombie films (see Platts forthcoming*a*). Not only have the commentaries in George Romero's films been lost on few viewers (Bishop 2010b, Dendle 2007: 51, Loudermilk 2003: 83-84), Romero himself has repeatedly admitted to imbuing his zombie films with leftist social critiques (see especially Williams 2011).

Scholars, therefore, suggest zombies can be "read as tracking a wide range of cultural, political, and economic anxieties of American society" (Dendle 2007: 45) and that zombie cinema acts as "a stylized reaction to cultural consciousness and particularly to social and political injustices" (Bishop 2009: 18) whose "basic fictional composition is determined by extant social horrors during its time of production" (Muntean and Payne 2009: 240). It is furthered argued that zombie films textually and numerically respond to periods of social strife, as Annalee Newitz (2009: 16) puts it, "war and social upheaval cause spikes in zombie movie production." Along these lines, numerous scholars argue the events of September 11, 2001 have caused both a spike in zombie film production and a recalibration of its content (Birch-Bayley 2012, Bishop 2009, Dendle 2011, Muntean and Payne 2009). Where scholars read Romero-influenced zombie texts progressively insofar as the problems presented therein cannot fold back into the dominant ideology (see Becker 2006, Wood 2004), post-9/11 zombie films exhibit more ambivalence. Muntean and Payne (2009), for instance, argue *28 Days Later* (2002) contains a reactionary conservative ideology by positioning "the hetero-normative nuclear family as

the natural, essential, yet potentially vulnerable core of civilization, which must be protected by oppressive state apparatuses such as the military" (249) and attributing the zombie menace to a few bad apples and/or rogue provocateurs. By way of contrast, *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) offers a more leftist text insofar as the cause of the zombie outbreak remains shrouded in mystery, the survivors form a nonhierarchical communal system where decisions are made collectively, and existing social structures fail to persist in the face of the problem (Muntean and Payne 2009: 249-254).

Peter Dendle (2012: 5-6) rightly points out that analyses like the ones discussed above, "tend to focus mostly on a handful of the most high-profile movies – movies which are culturally important by dint of their popularity, but which are not always representative of the broader genre." In this sense, reflectionist zombie studies remain vulnerable to empirical scrutiny, such as their tendency to select certain examples as representative and regarding others as not. Such analyses favor the sampling of films commensurate with the author's quest to demonstrate the zombie as a cipher to contemporaneous fears. As an example, Kyle Bishop (2010a: 181) handles a thrush low-budget straight-to-video zombie films that do not neatly fit reflection models thusly, "most of the zombie fare from the 1980s and '90s is lackluster at best, attempting little to no cultural work and providing scholars with almost nothing of substance to analyze." Likewise, reflectionist studies too often attempt to construct essentialized zombie ideal-types (e.g. voodoo-themed zombies from the 1930s and 1940s, Romero-styled zombies, post-9/11 rage zombies), often missing the diffuse application of zombies in other (con)texts (see Hand 2011, Platts forthcoming*a*, Vials 2011).

Production-based approaches, discussed in greater detail next chapter, arose from abstract debates within reflectionist camps over the relationship between culture and social structure (Hall, Neitz, Battani 2003: 190). Production perspectives focus on how the content of cultural objects such as films are heavily influenced by law, technology, careers, markets, organization structure, and industry structure (DiMaggio 2000; Peterson 1982, 1985, 1994; Peterson and Anand 2004, Ryan 2007). Scholars within this tradition focus on the institutional factors exogenous to the act of creation, but do not suggest artists' visions or audience taste preferences are insignificant (cf. Peterson 1994). Rarely used in film industry analysis (but see Kapsis 2009), recent turns in film studies toward organizational analysis (summarized in Nowell 2012b) offer a fecund entry point for a synergistic dialogue between film studies and sociology. Particularly instructive is Brad O'Brien's (2008) study of Italian zombie cinema. Challenging the reflectionist idea the Italian zombie films provide viewers a reverse affirmation of the Catholic faith (cf. Toppe 2011), O'Brien (2008) shows how interorganizational decision chains played a greater role in formulating the Italian zombie cycle of the late-1970s and early-1980s; specifically, O'Brien remarks the first Italian zombie film was conceived "as a quick way to cash in on the success of George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead,* which opened in Italy in 1978 and grossed a million dollars in a month and a half" (56-57). O'Brien (2008: 59) furthers "Italian studios are reluctant to fund genre films unless they are imitations of other genre films whose success they can exploit" and "a successful genre film will inspire dozens of imitations until audiences get bored with the genre." It was the success of an American zombie film, *Dawn of the Dead*, and industry gatekeepers' response to it that spawned the Italian zombie film, not a byproduct of Catholic eschatology. Still

unanswered, however, is how the zombie can adapt to and be seen in so many diverse situations? How are zombies so allegorically malleable? To fully grasp this aspect of the zombie, we must understand its ever-evolving textual blueprint. In other words, we need to understand the (changing) rules of zombie films.

Endogenous approaches grew in response to tendencies of associating cultural change to external events, whether as a reflection of social change or changes in the milieus of production (for a review see Kaufman 2004). Endogenous perspectives posit that cultural variation occurs in relatively bounded ecosystems wherein internal mechanisms make up the primary engines of change – restricting and contouring the influences of exogenous factors (Kaufman 2004, Lieberson 2000, Molotch 2005: 15-20). Endogenists focus on the aspects of culture that operate independent of external social forces, arguing tendencies of emulation and imitation for distinction and differentiation drive cultural ecosystems and form the basis of modification and stasis. Stanley Lieberson (2000: 92-111) proposes the "ratchet effect" to understand how change supersedes cultural equilibrium which observes: 1) new cultural objects usually build off of existing ones and 2) cultural change does not oscillate, but gradually propels in certain directions. The ratchet effects explains how small alterations made on existing cultural objects gradually result in large changes over time such as in the development of new film genres or subgenres like the Nazi zombie film, screwball comedy, or historical epic (Altman 1999: 49-68, Isaac 2009, Neale 2000: 218). Within culture industries, emulation and imitation commonly buffer the capital risks involved in producing a new television show, film, or music album. Gatekeepers of the industries reduce risk by selecting products that incorporate themes from prior successes, proven stars, and/or experienced

production teams into new projects (Altman 1999: 59-62, Bielby and Bielby 1994, Gitlin 2000; see also chapter 3). In most cases the extensive practice of emulation and innovation eventually produces new generic forms, but this did not happen with zombie cinema. The ecological rules of zombie films – abetted by inconsistent discursive labeling practices (discussed in chapter 3) – were flexible enough to encompass obviously contradictory monsters.

1.3 Sensitizing Concepts: Transition Capacity, Opportunity Space, and Endogenous Genre Ecology

While taken singly, each perspective discussed above enhances our understanding of how zombie cinema evolved, none, I argue, is sufficient by itself. We need an analytic strategy to understand how the perspectives operate in concert. Sensitizing concepts, according to Herbert Blumer (1954), heuristically guide analysis and data collection and can help consolidate disparate research schools. Rather than being proscriptive, sensitizing concepts orient us where to look, what to look for, and provide anticipations on what we can expect to find (van den Hoonaard 1997). In discussing and developing "transition capacity," "opportunity space," and "endogenous genre ecology," I suggest that reflection, production, endogenous approaches are not epistemologically autonomous, but operate simultaneously in a co-constitutive fashion and express themselves through each other.

Wedded with reflection perspectives, I use "transition capacity" to refer to the ability of particular genres to shift or enter auspices of production. Focus is placed on the genre itself rather than just the macrosocial environment or material milieus of production. Auspices can be temporal or material in orientation. Temporal auspices refer

to the macrosocial environment (i.e. the zeitgeist) under which genres (e.g. zombie films, westerns, musicals, ganster films) develop. While some genres may find success under one temporal auspice, they may be unable transfer to a different temporal auspice (Grindon 2012: 53-55). For instance, Cold War related fears provided a fertile entryway for "alien invasion films" in the fifties, but the civil unrest of the sixties jaundiced their continuance (Hendershot 2001, Jancovich 1996, O'Donnell 2003). Similarly, gothic horrors such as Frankenstein's monster, vampires, mummies, and werewolves momentarily fell out of favor as atomic anxiety spread throughout the United States (ibid.). In other words, some genres may experience production spikes because they tap into relevant social issues while other genres may fall out of favor for not (Grindon 2012, Klein 2011). As sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1989: 3) argues, if cultural objects "do not articulate closely enough with their social settings, they are likely to be regarded" as "irrelevant, unrealistic, artificial, and overly abstract, or worse, their producers will be unlikely to receive the support necessary to carry on their work."

Material auspices refer to the productive milieus responsible for the creation of cultural objects. Material auspices, by their very constitution, cater to certain expressions of a cultural object over others (Grindon 2012: 53-55; Nowell 2013; Peterson and Berger 1975; Peterson 1978, 1990; Romao 2003). When *Frankenstein* (1931) confirmed the salability of horror films – which first suggested by *Dracula* (1931) – to industry elites, the story acquisition practices of Hollywood's major studios as detailed by Tino Balio (1993: 98-103) preempted the identification of non-European based horror films (see chapters 4 and 5). Instead I show how the monster of the *Magic Island* procured its silver screen debut in a relatively low-budget independently produced film in chapter 4.

Likewise, institutional reorientations of production may disfavor the continuation of certain genres where prior configurations privileged them (Grindon 2012: 53-55, Romao 2003). For instance, post-World War II industry trends in filmmaking virtually eliminated B films from studio rosters (Davis 2012, Schatz 1997; chapter 6) while low-budget filmmakers jettisoned predictable genre product in favor of films designed to cash-in on cultural ephemera (Flynn and McCarthy 1975: 34-37) such as musical fads (Stanfield 2010), juvenile delinquency (Doherty 2002, Klein 2011: 100-137), and teenage culture more generally (Doherty 2002, Shary 2012). Moreover, the necessity of cost-prohibitive resources also blunts generic expansion and evolution. *Variety* reporter Jack Jungmeyer (1939: 8), to take an example, linked the failure to follow-up on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937) to the fact that "elaborate animations of this kind are so staggeringly expensive to make." Transition capacity sensitizes us to the idea that genres must respond to both social and industrial conditions of production in order to flourish. Incapability with one domain can hamstring the persistence of a genre and – in combination with other forces – can even recalibrate it as discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

Related to production approaches, I employ "opportunity space(s)" to pinpoint the advantageous alignment of historical events or material procedures that influence cultural producers to develop, invent, or produce a cultural object. With opportunity space I place focus on the impact of mercurial conditions of production and the institutional and entrepreneurial responses to them. Historical events can be extra-industrial or intra-industrial (sometimes the line is blurred). Extra-industrial events refer to significant moments exogenous to the operations of culture producing industries that are not necessarily macrosocial in scope, but impact industry conduct and in the process open or

close opportunities for certain generic expressions. An example of an extra-industrial event would be how the success of *Halloween* (1978) and *Friday the 13th* (1980) helped spawn a cycle of teenage slasher films that dominated early-1980s horror productions (Kapsis 2009, Nowell 2011a). A decade earlier, *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1973) influenced the dominance of possession films throughout the 1970s (see Cook 2000: 222-228; Fischer 1996; Nowell 2011a: 128, 2011c: 125-128; Sobchack 1987; chapter 8). Extra-industrial events can also close opportunities for genres. For instance, the House Un-American Activities Committee's investigation of Hollywood's left curtailed the examination of political issues in film (Neve 2003). Similarly, the cooption of the X-rating by the adult film industry significantly factored in a mainstream abandonment of X-rated films (Lewis 2002, Sandler 2007, Wyatt 1999). Intra-industrial events refer to significant moments endogenous to the operations of culture producing industries that impact their conduct and in the process open or close opportunity spaces for cultural objects. An intra-industrial event like the adoption of sound helped lead to the production of a steady stream of musicals (Balio 1993: 211-235), but also narrowed the opportunity to produce silent films. The same could be said for the proliferation of color in the 1950s and the dwindling prospects for black-and-white films thereafter (Casper 2007: 93-96, Heffernan 2004: 44-62, Lev 2003: 107-109).

Ordinary industry procedures commonly result in unsated demands that are sometimes filled by niche-oriented producers (Peterson and Berger 1975, Lopes 1992, Wyatt 2005). Because of this, a genre's lack of transition capacity in one material auspice can actually create an opportunity space for entrepreneurs to produce it elsewhere. I highlight a process like this in chapter 5 where I describe how zombie-centered films

were misaligned with dominant studio practices, but because of their relative success an opportunity space materialized for Poverty Row studios to produce them (see also Platts forthcoming*b*). In a similar vein, extra-industrial events such as technological advances in exhibition and distribution can open opportunity spaces for generic expressions with little to no transition capacity (Lobato 2012, Lobato and Ryan 2011; chapter 9). Opportunity space shows us that historical events and industrial trends influence the constitution and possibilities of production with the repercussions of each opening or closing opportunities to pursue certain genre expressions.

Anchored by endogenous perspectives, I define "endogenous genre ecology" as a genre's temporary "blueprint" (Altman 1999: 14) and its amenability to reinterpretation and change through temporal, material, and discursive forces. Endogenous genre ecology acknowledges that genres are processually defined, always under construction, and never fixed (Cherry 2009: 14-19, Cohen 1986: 204-210, Neale 2000: 217-220; chapter 3). Variations, however, are not boundless or arbitrary, they are conscribed by a blueprint, "a formula that precedes, programmes, and patterns industry production" (Altman 1999: 14). The genre ecologies of specific blueprints provide different configurations of imaginative innovation under which they develop. Genres lacking clearly defined boundaries may be reconfigured through processes such as hybridization and discursive reinterpretation, while genres with defined boundaries resist drastic changes and reinterpretation (but are not immune to them). Temporary blueprints mitigate what alterations are acceptable or unacceptable, but they also precondition the influence of the auspices of production and historical events (Lieberson 2000). That is to say, some aspects of genres resist exogenous forces and are driven by their own internal rules; the

clearer the boundaries, the greater the resistance to exogenous pressures (and vice versa). The zombie's loosely bound genre ecology rendered (and continues to render) it susceptible to significant reinterpretation, transforming the monster completely in the late-1970s (see chapter 8).

Ecological blueprints can be altered in a variety of ways. A genre can be inconsistently recognized in different films such as the case of early melodramas (Neale 1993), thrillers, chillers, and horror (Jancovich 2009), and women's films and horror (Jancovich 2010, Snelson 2009) allowing for ecological osmosis. Differing iterations of a genre may be favored under certain material settings such as the privileging of teen-oriented horror films at American International Pictures in the 1950s (Davis 2012, Doherty 2002, Heffernan 2004), ultra gory zombie movies tailored for the straight-to-video market (Dendle 2012, Russell 2006: 151-160), or the "high concept" films desired by the conglomerated studios (Wyatt 1994). Temporal events may select one representation over another as argued by reflection approaches. And, finally, commercial successes may popularize certain generic configurations over others like *Dawn of the Dead*'s influence on subsequent zombie films (specifically Italian zombie films) or *Fat City*'s (1972) influence on "comeback" boxing films like *Rocky* (1976) and *Raging Bull* (1980) (Grindon 2007, 2012: 49-50). Endogenous genre ecology attunes us to the fact that the internal rules of a genre mold the influence of industrial and cultural factors, but industrial and cultural factors also influence the internal rules of a genre.

1.4 A Note on Sources, Data, Analysis, and Dates

With few archival materials available, the job I set in this study is made all the more difficult. Following methodological strategies employed by Blair Davis (2012),

Richard Nowell (2011a), and Eric Schaefer (1999) among others, I draw extensively upon the industry trade sources *Variety*, *Motion Picture Herald*, *Film Daily* and major newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. These sources provide a welter of information regarding the changing conditions of film production and were widely available (and likely read) by the professionals involved in making zombie films. They, thus, likely affected the conduct of filmmakers, but more importantly the trades provide a trail of records on individual films, the film's commercial performances, commentary from their makers and insiders, and general contemporaneous observations concerning industry logic and strategies of filmmaking. Collectively they provide a record of the material and temporal aspects of production I strive to understand by delivering an industry-wide overview of the changes that occurred throughout the period of analysis (Nowell 2011a: 7-8). Accessing private and library collections was determined to be beyond the scope of my intended analysis. The pursuant chapters mean to serve as theoretical entrees into the construction and evolution of a generic cultural object, not a meticulous history of individual films.

To construct a sample of documents I performed a series of targeted key word and phrase searches in the *Variety*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times* archives. Those terms were: "horror film(s)," "horror cycle(s)," "zombie film(s)," terminological deviations (e.g. horror pix), the names of individual zombie films, significant filmmakers (e.g. Roger Corman), and so on. I also collected a stratified random sample of one issue for each month per year from 1931 to 1979 in the weekly *Variety* (see Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 2005: 108-117) for a clearer picture of the major trends influencing film production. Because I lacked access to searchable databases for *Motion Picture Herald*, *Film Daily*,

and other primary sources, I tracked down articles cited in the secondary literature through the InterLibrary loan system at the University of Missouri. My dataset focuses on fifty-three films that were identified contemporaneously as zombie films and which were produced primarily for the American market between the years 1932 and 1979. I also discuss some films that were not deemed zombie films by mainstream publications, but share affinities with films that were. This allows me to "include a wide range of films as possible, while not trying misrepresent" the genre (Tudor 1989: 6). True to studies documenting discursive inconsistencies in genres, my sample includes films having seemingly little in common. Rather than reject films like *The Return of Dr. X* (1939) as faux zombie films, I include them to foster a broader understanding of the processes that evolved the genre and to gain enhanced insight into junctural constructions of zombies.

Once located, each film was subjected to a qualitative content analysis to assess the dominant themes that emerged from each text. Qualitative content analysis is the subjective interpretation of a text's content through systematic classification schemes of coding and the identification of themes or patterns (see Hsieh and Shannon 2005). This included both a chronological description of the film and synopses of the main narrative elements (cf. Griswold 2000: 21-25). I also respond to calls made by Gregory Waller (1987: 8-12) and Richard Nowell (2011a: 5, 2011c: 117) by searching for the ways that zombie films intersected with and were influenced by contemporaneous trends in film production and promotion. I accomplished this by treating the evolution of zombie films as a series of distinct phases entwined in general industry developments, market sifts, and changing commercial logics undergirding film production. Finally, I give the date of release whenever a film is first mentioned in a chapter. The filmography lists all zombie

films referenced in the text and their release dates and directors, so readers who want to look up a date mid-chapter can find it there.

1.5 Limitations

Two limitations emerge as significant to discuss. First, my study only covers zombie film production to 1979. Admittedly my sampling frame misses the vast majority of zombie films ever produced (Dendle 2007: 45, 2012; Newitz 2009). While casual fans even most scholars consider the post-1979 period more "analytically interesting," I aim to provide a detailed sociological analysis of how the modern zombie films came in to existence rather than a broad survey of their various changes (these accounts have already been produced). Too often studies gloss over zombies' early development and evolution to get to their more "productive" and "interesting" phases, thereby missing out on zombies' complex early genealogy. Second, I confine my analysis strictly to zombie films produced for the United States. Since filmmaking industries around the world significantly vary, a detailed sociological analysis of different national traditions in zombie cinema would be unwieldy. I do not discount the significance of international zombie films or the increasing role of globalization in film production (Balio 1998, 2002; Lobato 2012; Lobato and Ryan 2011; Morris 2008; Ryan 2010), I have simply narrowed my frame of analysis to provide a deeper discussion of the zombie's industrial development in the United States. Moreover, I briefly discuss the importance of conglomeration and globalization on zombie film production in the conclusion.

1.6 Chapter Overviews

Chapter 2 develops the production-of-culture perspective as a research methodology. In addition to providing an overview of the perspective, I briefly consider

how the sensitizing concepts discussed in this chapter can add to its well-established research tradition. Chapter 3 discusses recent developments in film genre theory, highlighting approaches that reject stability between genre corpus and genre label, approaches that examination the hybridization of genres, and approaches that focus on the economic logics underpinning the short-term rationale behind genre production. I also discuss how writers consider zombie films a genre within the chapter and spotlight what my study can offer genre debates.

The analytic chapters break up the evolution of zombie cinema into temporally distinct phases of production, each governed by different commercial objectives and temporal conditions. Chapter 4 posits that the genesis of zombie cinema in the form of *White Zombie* (1932) occurred less from a morbid fascination with Haiti and more from general industrial factors and the strategies of entrepreneurial filmmakers. The opportunity spaces responsible for the production of *White Zombie* closed shortly thereafter, cordoning off the potential for subsequent zombie films. I also cover the tepid performance and responses to *Love Wanga* (1934) and *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936) in the chapter before taking stock of zombies' early endogenous genre ecology. Chapter 5 analyzes zombies' matriculation into the material auspices of Poverty Row and the major studios. Where the thinly capitalized Poverty Row companies produced zombie-centered films, major studio productions either featured zombies as peripheral characters or reviewers mistakenly suggested the presence of the creatures in films having seemingly little in common with them. The differences between the types of "zombie film" production, one purposive the other incidental, graft onto the material logics that conditioned film production during the studio era. Zombie-centered films bettered

attuned to Poverty Row's production strategies, but zombies' wide endogenous genre ecology saw them in films like *The Walking Dead* (1936) and *The Return of Dr. X*.

Chapter 6 examines a purportedly fallow, understudied era in zombie film historiography – the period between 1955 and 1967. Seen as a transition phase from "white zombies" to "night zombies," the period contests the notion that zombie films numerically respond to periods of social upheaval. I challenge conventional wisdom by positing this era of zombie cinema as furtive, providing the tinder for three distinct cycles of zombie film – each calibrated by the zombies' transition capacity, endogenous genre ecology, and the opportunity spaces available at the time. The production and identification of several science fiction-based zombie films, often called weirdies by the trade press, paved the way for *Night of the Living Dead*'s recognition as a zombie film (cf. Beck 1972, Heffernan 2002), not a ghoul film (see chapter 7).

Chapter 7 analyzes the production and significance of *Night of the Living Dead*. Contrary to auteurist understandings of its genesis, I show how *Night of the Living Dead*'s production was a collaborative process that sowed the seeds for a new blueprint/endogenous genre ecology for subsequent zombie films. The producers of *Night of the Living Dead* exploited a number of opportunity spaces opening in the latter half of the 1960s. Controversies surrounding ratings and violence, however, stultified the transition capacity of the ecology set by *Night of the Living Dead.* Chapter 8 assesses the period right after *Night of the Living Dead* and culminates with the release and immediate aftermath of *Dawn of the Dead*. Where *Rosemary's Baby* sparked a high-profile cycle of possession films, *Night of the Living Dead's* cult popularity in the midnight movie circuit inspired a smattering of low-budget underground copycats like *Garden of the Dead*

(1972) and *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* (1972) that rarely captured the attention of the trade press. *Dawn of the Dead* solidified the zombie genre, but its institutionalization was pyrrhic in that it did not transition well with the mandates of the major studios who now demanded "incontestable Rs" (Sandler 2002). Hence, zombies would not return to the mainstream until the mid-1980s with *Return of the Living Dead* (1985) and *Day of the Dead* (1985) when onscreen violence was more acceptable and slasher films had run their course (Nowell 2011d, 2012a). My concluding chapter briefly considers subsequent developments in zombie movies. Specifically, I discuss the boom and bust of straight-to-video zombie films from the 1980s and touch upon the post-9/11 resurgence of zombie cinema – connecting it more to technological developments in production and distribution than a resonance with a post-9/11 mentalité (cf. Lobato and Ryan 2011). Finally, I summarize my study's main points and articulate its general lessons.

Chapter 2 : Notes Toward a Sociological Methodology for (Zombie) Film

2.1 Introduction

Prevailing literature on zombie films tracks the monster's development through numerous macrosocial developments like the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, the civil and racial unrest of the 1960s, the Vietnam War-era, the rise of American consumerism, the Reagan revolution, and 9/11. While those accounts can reveal how certain zombie films were influenced by the zeitgeist and how the zeitgeist was drawn upon when individual filmmakers decided what type of zombie film to produce, reflection accounts too often annex zombie films from industrial, commercial, and market forces. It is one thing to claim that social and political upheaval temper spikes and recalibrations in zombie cinema but quite another thing to claim that colonialism, political culture, civil unrest, and post-9/11 paranoia singlehandedly initiate, sustain, and accelerate high levels of zombie film production. A recent study by Richard Nowell (2013) on the lack of roller disco films, despite record profits for roller discos in the late-1970s and the success of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), for instance, distills numerous "temporal discrepancies" in reflection orientations. Specifically, Nowell (ibid.) points out that by overlooking interorganizational production procedures, reflection studies fail to explain why only certain social forces and current events get articulated in production trends. In a similar study, Robert Kapsis (2009) discovered the belated release of horror films exaggerated the extensiveness of the horror boom in the early-1980s. Conversely, Kapsis also found the 1983 horror genre bust had little to do with dwindling audiences and more with gatekeepers' perception of market saturation. These and other studies

demonstrate the necessity for an industrially centered approach on genre to augment textual-level analysis.

Within sociology, a body of literature appearing under the aegis of the production-of-culture (POC) perspective highlights how the nature and content of cultural products are embedded in and influenced by their localized industrial milieus of production. I detail the historical and scholarly development of the POC perspective in this chapter, organizing my discussion around the "the six-facet model of the production nexus" (Peterson and Anand 2004: 313). Because exemplary general overviews exist elsewhere (see especially Peterson and Anand 2004, Ryan 2007), I narrow my discussion of the perspective as it pertains to the sociological study of zombie films and films more generally. The examples utilized are not intended to be exhaustive, but demonstrative of the perspective's practicality and usefulness; in that sense the examples are necessarily partial. I conclude by considering how the sensitizing concepts introduced in the previous chapter help address problems identified within the production of culture perspective.

2.2 The Production-of-Culture Perspective

Developed at a time when the sociological study of culture reached an epistemological stalemate (DiMaggio 2000, Ryan 2007), the POC perspective helped resuscitate sociological interest in culture by sidestepping a "theoretical impasse between highly abstract functionalist and Marxist theories of culture" (Hall, Neitz, and Battani 2003: 190). Prior dominant ideas held that culture and social structure mirrored each other. Both Marxists and functionalists agreed on a symbiotic relationship between a monolithic social system and its coherently manifest overarching culture, but disagreed on the influence of the relationship (Williams 1980). POC practitioners countered by

suggesting both culture and social structure are emergent and the relationship between them is problematic and non-isomorphic (Peterson 1992: 43-44, 1994). Cultural objects can and do reflect society, but that reflection is never perfect – backgrounds and commitments of producers and creators sculpt the artistic insights they offer to the public (Peterson 1985, 1992) in addition to the material circumstances of production. Furthermore, Steve Neale (2000: 213) contends that authorial visions are always vetted through existing institutional arrangements, conventions, and forms. Moreover, what gets created and what gets made widely available to the public often depends on complex interorganizational networks (Hirsch 1972, Kapsis 2009, Nowell 2013, Rossman 2012). These institutional relations between people, the productive interface, and cultural objects serve as the locus of POC analyses.

Studies from the 1950s, 1960s, and early-1970s demonstrated the embryo that would become the POC perspective (Peterson and Anand 2004: 312, Ryan 2007: 222) with Harrison and Cynthia White's (1993) 1965 monograph *Canvasses and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* being the first study to explicitly promote the utility of an institutional turn in the sociology of culture by highlighting the role played by markets and gatekeepers in the emergence of French impressionist art in the nineteenth-century (Peterson and Anand 2004: 312, Ryan 2007: 222). Richard A. Peterson brought the POC approach to fruition in the late-1970s (Peterson 1976, 1979), heralding it as a coherent and self-conscious approach to understanding how cultural objects "come to be and continue to be" (Becker 1982: 1). Since Peterson's (1976) prolegomenon to the perspective, the POC perspective has undergone a number of

cosmetic changes mostly in regards to the facets of production (compare Peterson 1982 with Peterson 1985), but its foundational premise has remained virtually unchanged.

The POC perspective's basic premise is that the nature and content of cultural objects are shaped by the social, legal, and economic milieus of their creation (DiMaggio 2000; Peterson 1982, 1985, 1990, 1994; Peterson and Anand 2004; Ryan 2007; Santoro 2008). In other words, the human organization involved in cultural production affects the constitution and composition of what is produced. Relatedly, changes in production processes and arrangements affect the content and essence of expressive culture. The perspective does not unseat other approaches such as reflection orientations or auteurism, but complements and reinforces them (Peterson 1982: 143, Peterson and Anand 2004: 327) by spotlighting the shadowed social systems connected artistic expression(s). POC helps us gain purchase on the essential contributions of the cultural industries to the emergence of cultural objects and their associated aesthetics (Peterson 1990). It reminds us that the creation of cultural forms is, inescapably, a social activity (Becker 1982, Brienza 2010). Zombie films, like other cultural productions, are products of complex, often formally organized, networks of interactions and zombie cinema's narratives and aesthetics bear the signs of this cooperation (Becker 1974). Within the POC perspective minimally six facets – technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structure, occupational careers, and market –formulate the field of cultural production which alone or in combination constrain or facilitate cultural creation (Peterson 1985, 1990; Peterson and Anand 2004; Ryan 2007). Since the facets work in concert, it is somewhat arbitrary to parse any one out for specific attention. However, when considered singly the facets offer a fruitful analytic heuristic for bracketing out how various factors

of the cultural industries impact the process of creation (Ryan 2007). Thus, it is along the lines of these factors that the next sections of this chapter are organized.

2.3 Technology

Technology provides the tools necessary for the operation of cultural industries (Peterson and Anand 2004: 314). Changes in technology often destabilize industries and create new opportunities for the creation of culture by democratizing the modes of production, distribution, and exhibition (Peterson and Ryan 2003, Ryan and Hughes 2006). Developments in home entertainment, illustrated in the conclusion, opened-up new ancillary markets which serve as a major source of revenue for major studios (Epstein 2006: 209-218, Wasser 2008), but also provide an outlet for lower budget independent films (Anderson 2008: 127-130, Lobato 2012: 21-36, Ryan 2010, Wasser 2008). In a 1980 interview George Romero presaged the influence of the still young video market, "For the first time, there's going to be a tool to put the audio-visual artist directly in touch with his audience" (qtd. in Honeycutt 1980: 23). Ramon Lobato (2012: 21) suggests genres thriving in the straight-to-video market create unique takes on generic aesthetics and establish their own iconographies and star systems. In the case of zombie cinema, the VHS boom helped spawn several cycles of low-budget zombie films with pictures such as *Bloodsuckers from Outer Space* (1984), *Raiders of the Living Dead* (1985), *Gore-met Zombie Chef from Hell* (1986), *I Was a Teenage Zombie* (1986), and *Redneck Zombies* (1987) in one and films like *The Dead Next Door* (1989), *Working Stiffs* (1989), *Ghoul School* (1990), *The Zombie Army* (1991), *Zombie Rampage* (1991), *Zombie Bloodbath* (1993), and *Zombie Bloodbath II* (1994) in another. Exploiting a niche neglected by mainstream horror trends, these films mostly traded in over-the-top gore

effects neglecting the social commentary that made the films directed by George Romero hallmarks of the genre (Bishop 2010a: 181). Today new waves of zombie films are churned out at dizzying speeds thanks to cheap digital cameras, desktop editing software, and the internet (Dendle 2012, Durick 2011).

Technological changes also function as historical barometers of the filmmaking industries. Brigid Cherry (2009: 59-60) observes, "The history of horror cinema is in one respect a history of technological developments and innovations in film" and later "the aesthetics of horror cinema are thus closely tied to the technologies available at any one time to any one filmmaker or group of technicians." Robert Kapsis (2009: 13) argues the increasing spectacle of violence of horror films is, in part, attributable to advances in makeup and special effects. Thus, while George Romero's films may be "markers of their times" (Wetmore 2011), the special effects and aesthetics of his films reveal just as much about the material auspices of feature film production as they do of the zeitgeist.

2.4 Law and Regulation

Legal and administrative regulatory constraints shape the industrial contexts within which cultural objects can develop (Peterson and Anand 2004, Ryan 2007). Laws and regulations provide the ground rules for what is produced, who is allowed to produce, and under what circumstances production occurs (ibid.). Regulatory constraints not only directly shape production, but indirectly as well. Richard Nowell (2011b) explains how the creators of *Friday the 13th* (1980) meticulously produced the film to avoid an X-rating, but also blended its narrative with snippets of other successful films such as *Meatballs* (1979), *The Pom Pom Girls* (1976), and of course, *Halloween* (1978) to demonstrate salability to major studio distributors. *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), by contrast,

did not, and arguably could not receive an R-rating making it a substantial exhibition risk (chapter 8). Likewise, George Romero did not fuse *Dawn of the Dead* with popular contemporaneous production trends (other than *Night of the Living Dead* [1968]), making the film even more of a gamble for potential suitors. Where the ease by which films like *Friday the 13th* could receive R-ratings facilitated a cycle of slasher films in the early 1980s (Kapsis 2009, Nowell 2011a), the ratings issues of Romero-inspired zombie films shied away subsequent studio investment (*Variety* 1979a; chapter 8). With the advent of home video technology an opportunity space opened causing an explosion of straight-to-video low-budget productions that swept the zombie genre in the early- to mid-1980s.

Self-censorship, particularly in the film industries, is also significant (Lewis 2002; Sandler 2002, 2007). Prior to the institution of the ratings system in 1968, the content of motion pictures was monitored by the industry's own Production Code Administration. Critics have routinely chastised the Code for inhibiting cinematic experimentation and shirking controversial material, Gary Alan Fine (1997) and Richard Maltby (1993), however, argue the motivations behind the Code were more economic than related to the actual content of films. Until 1952, films were not given first protection rights meaning provincial censors yielded tremendous power over the content of films (Schaefer 1999: 138-143). The Production Code Administration allowed the major studios to collectively handle and preempt the censoriousness of local boards while simultaneously blunting the power of moral entrepreneurs such as the politically influential League of Decency (Fine 1997). A consequence of this practice was the perpetuation of Hollywood's oligopoly as films declined a Production Code Administration seal were often barred from lucrative first-run theaters (Heffernan 2004: 4, Schaefer 1999: 153-156). The Production Code

Administration also allowed the studios to handle controversies surrounding cinema in a collective and controlled manner (Maltby 1993, Schaefer 1999: 156-157). Inevitably the mandates of the Code (which included prohibitions on violence, sexualities, religious representations, and the like) preempted potentially transgressive cinematic fare, particularly studio-era horror films (Bansak 2003, Berenstein 1996, Naylor 2011, Skal 2001). Specifically, Alex Naylor (2011) documents how pressures from the Production Code Administration caused the major studios to abandon horror film production between 1937 and 1938. I speculate on the implications of this hiatus on zombie films in chapters 4 and 5.

Copyright serves as a focal point in production of culture analysis (Griswold 1981, Ryan 2007). Copyright transforms ranges of creative activity into property that can be bought, sold, stolen and litigated about (Peterson 1982, 1985, 1990) and it serves as the foundation of for-profit mass media industries (Ryan 2007). Copyright is essential because millions and even billions of dollars hinge on its interpretation. *Night of the Living Dead* offers a case in point. Set to be released as *Night of the Flesh Eaters*, the Walter Reade Organization wished for a more commercial-sounding title in distribution. When the title was changed to *Night of the Living Dead*, the copyright was inadvertently left off the title screen. According to David Pierce (2007: 129) exhibitors soon discovered they could play the film without paying a rental. *Night of the Living Dead*'s lack of copyright immediately put it in the public domain costing its crew and distributor millions. Ironically, this oversight abetted the development of the film's reputation as it rapidly spread through the art-house and midnight movie circuits unencumbered by legal

prohibitions against exhibition, helping to establish *Night of the Living Dead* as a quintessential example of the zombie genre (Bailey 2011).

POC practitioners highlight antitrust law as significant also (Peterson 1985). Prior to 1948 the filmmaking industry operated as a "mature oligopoly" (Balio 1993) with five vertically integrated companies (Paramount, Loew's [MGM], Warner Bros, 20th Century-Fox, and RKO) controlling production, exhibition, and distribution and three partially integrated companies (Universal, Columbia and United Artists) who maintained close-ties with the Big Five. This arrangement allowed the major studios to produce a variety of features by guaranteeing a venue for them (Balio 1993, Flynn and McCarthy 1975, Schatz 1997). However, the Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.* forced the studios to divest themselves of their theater holdings, effectively halting the studio era of filmmaking and profoundly altering the business in the process (King 2002: 24-35). Without guaranteed exhibition and a declining audience, the majors reoriented their production strategies, concentrating on the production of fewer bigger budgeted films designed for the maximum possible audience (Davis 2012, Heffernan 2004, King 2002, Lev 2003, Matlby 2003: 159-188, Schatz 1993). Kevin Heffernan (2004) argues this post-studio landscape of filmmaking catalyzed opportunities for independent horror producers like William Castle, Samuel Z. Arkoff, and Roger Corman who produced mostly exploitation fare for teenage audiences.

2.5 Industry Structure

Industry structure involves the number and relative sizes of firms in the market producing cultural objects (Peterson 1985, Ryan 2007). Production of culturists view innovation and diversity and industry structure as deeply entwined (for a review see

Dowd 2007).[5] Oligopolized industry structures produce toxic results for innovation and diversity because the focus turns to producing standardized products aimed at the largest swaths of the buying public as possible. Oligopolistic productive logics disincentivize stylistic innovation because of the risk associated with the capital mobilization involved in new creations. Similarly, diversity is disincentivized because of the risk associated with unproven talent/producers. The films discussed in chapter 5 seem to challenge the wisdom of years of production of culture research; however, in utilizing my sensitizing concepts and conceptual framework I demonstrate a tacit reconciliation with the prevailing literature. In addition to stifling innovation, oligopolized industry structures often introduce/induce significant barriers to market entry enabling major companies to avoid the provisioning of innovative product to their audiences (Crane 1997, DiMaggio 1977). This allows them to push otherwise popular cultural expressions to the periphery of the market as in the case of *Dawn of the Dead* (Gagne 1987; see also chapter 8).

Industry structure is also deeply influenced by the nature of ownership (Peterson 1985, 1990). Prior to the 1960s all the major film companies dealt solely with filmmaking; their successes (or failures) hinged on the popularity of their films and little else. Starting with Gulf + Western's acquisition of Paramount Pictures in 1966, motion picture studios became subsidiaries of larger corporations. No longer beholden to only ticket sales, Hollywood's new business model includes "creating rights that can be licensed, sold and leveraged over different platforms, including television, DVD, and video games" (Epstein 2010: 22) and creating synergies with other cultural products such as lucrative toy lines (Schatz 1993, Turner 2006) and other commercial tie-ins (Miller

[5] Innovation, according to DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985), is a measure/outcome concerning the heterogeneity of cultural objects. Conversely, DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) argue that diversity manifests itself in the heterogeneity of cultural producers.

2001, Turner 2006, Wyatt 1994). Throughout this change of industry structure, mainstream film production's essential aim has remained the same: "producing the maximum pleasure for the maximum number for the maximum profit" (Maltby 2003: 14-15). However, many movies are now glorified advertisements for other products (Miller 2001). This makes cultivation of a mainstream audience for horror films perniciously difficult, but as Thomas Austin (2002), Ian Conrich (2010), and Richard Nowell (2011a, b) demonstrate, not impossible. Unfortunately, zombies lacked the marketability of other horror stars like Dracula, Dr. Frankenstein, Freddy Krueger, Jason Vorhees, Pinhead, or even Michael Myers, forcing them to the periphery. Even with their renewed popularity, zombie films still experience less box-office success than other horror icons (Terry, King, and Patterson 2011).

2.6 Organizational Structure

Organizational structure refers to the routinized manner in which coordinated activity actualizes itself in the creation of cultural objects (Peterson 1982). A focus on organizational structure places the onus of analytic attention within an individual firm (e.g. Paramount Pictures) rather than on the patterns of industry conduct (e.g. Hollywood as industry). Within the time frame of my analysis two organizational structures emerge as relevant: the producer-unit system and package-unit system.

Early into the studio era the film industry adopted the producer-unit system of production to reduce overhead costs (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985, *Motion Picture Herald* 1931a). As an organizational strategy of production, the producer-unit system lasted until roughly the conclusion of the studio era in 1948. Unit production entailed a cluster of producers who supervised a number of films (typically six to eight)

per year; usually each producer would concentrate on a particular type of film. Described by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson (1985: 322) unit based production resulted in further divisions of labor in film production especially the areas of "story acquisition, script writing, research, casting, pre-shooting, production, cinematography, make-up, and marketing research." I argue this material auspice deeply circumscribed the type of horror film produced by the major studios during the 1930s and 1940s in chapter 5. The practical results of unit production, in effect, provided the opportunity space for Poverty Row studios to exploit a reasonably successful, easily retrievable formula in zombie centered voodoo-laced zombie films (Platts forthcoming*b*).

Following the studio era, the majors adopted a new technique of organizing creative labor: the package-unit system of production. In contrast, to the producer-unit system wherein labor and capital were contained in-house, the package-unit system entailed the arrangement of labor and capital on a short-term film-by-film arrangement where "rather than an individual company containing the source of the labor and materials, the entire industry became the pool for these" (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985: 330; see also King 2002: 28-30, Lev 2003: 24-32). Linked to the extra-industrial postwar shifts covered by Blair Davis (2012), Thomas Doherty (2002), and Kevin Heffernan (2004), Hollywood's major studios no longer mass produced many films, but fostered the production of fewer films by more producers (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985: 331). Concentration on fewer films led to the pursuance of a blockbuster strategy as films now stood on their individual merits or ability attract cross-over promotions (Cook 2000, Schatz 1993, Wyatt 1994) which deflated the B-film as it was understood in the 1930s and 1940s (Davis 2012, Flynn and McCarty 1975: 34-37,

Tzioumakis 2006: 135-160) and with it took the air out of the lungs of the voodoo inspired zombie film (see chapter 6).

Outside the major studios, independent producers often marched to the beat of a different drum (Merritt 2000). Zombie cinema is littered with filmmakers and film crews bucking traditional organizational logics. From the Halperins efforts on *White Zombie* (1932) and *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936) to Ed Wood Jr.'s *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959) and *Orgy of the Dead* (1966) to Ray Dennis Steckler's *Incredibly Strange Creatures who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-up Zombies* (1964) to George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead* and beyond, producers have wittingly or unwittingly exploited the zombie's endogenous genre ecology to capitalize on opportunity spaces opened up the productive gaps left by prevailing industry doxa. The organizational logics employed by these mavericks are not arbitrary or reckless, but shrewd and strategic and heavily tempered by the industry's dominant practices. Their production strategies are closely associated with a career pattern Richard A. Peterson (1990: 109) termed entrepreneurs, which is covered in the next section.

2.7 Occupational Careers

Since cultural objects are produced through sustained collective activity, each field of production must develop a career system and networks of relations to lubricate the gears of production (Peterson and Anand 2004). Career structures help balance the need for innovation with organizational predilections for predictability (Ryan 2007). As hinted at above the studio and post-studio era created massively distinct career opportunities. Borrowing from Peterson (1990) two career paths in creation of zombie cinema can be discerned: functionaries and entrepreneurs. Functionaries, according to

Peterson (1990: 109), "fill the ranks of bureaucratically structured organizations. They are … the source of continuity in the culture industry." Functionaries are often under contract, paid a salary, and are answerable to rigid bureaucratically mandated strictures. Entrepreneurs, in contrast, "are persons who, sensing an un-met audience demand, bring together creative, financing, marketing, and distributing factors in unique ways" (ibid.). Entrepreneurs cull together preexisting elements in manners not foreseen by bureaucratically organized culture producers. Functionaries can clearly be seen when zombie films came under the purview of the formalized productive logics of the major studios and Poverty Row which is outlined in chapter 5. In contrast, chapters 4 and 7 show how entrepreneurs first introduced (chapter 4) and then fundamentally altered the nature of the genre (chapter 7).

Because the pool of potential creators exceeds an industry's ability to market them, creative fields employ specialized gatekeepers who selectively – often arbitrarily – favor certain producers over others (Hirsch 1972, Peterson and Anand 2004). The work of Bielby and Bielby (1994), Gitlin (2000), Kapsis (2009), Rossman (2012), and Nowell (2013) demonstrates the enormous sway of gatekeepers in varying entertainment industries. In assaying prospective talent, gatekeepers usually emphasize aspects of familiarity (such as likenesses to prior successes, easy generic attribution, proven production/creative teams, etc.) over the unproven/under-proven. This partly explains the distributive troubles experienced by George Romero and writer-producer Russ Streiner when they drove a finished version of *Night of the Living Dead* to New York, studios simply did not know what to do with it; they could not envision a market for the film (Gagne 1987, Russo 1985). This problem resurfaced for Romero again when he tried

acquiring a distributor for *Dawn of the Dead* as most studios were unwilling to take on an X-rated or unrated film (Nowell 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).

2.8 Market

Markets form to render order to the swirling constellations of consumer taste (Peterson and Anand 2004). In POC discourse, market refers to the audience as it is imagined and articulated by key personnel in cultural industries (Kapsis 2009; Peterson 1982, 1985, 1990). Terminological preference is given to market over audience to denote how industry conceptualizes its consumers (Peterson 1990: 111-112). This discursive maneuver conflicts with reflection models which confer molding agency to the audience because filmmakers offer a portfolio of films to cater to the national will (Kapsis 2009: 3-4, Neale 2007a: 261). POC research, in contrast, posits that what is most important in shaping the decisions of gatekeepers is not the actual or potential audience, but their understanding of the audience (Peterson 1985, 1990). As already noted, Kapsis (2009) discovered that distributors played a larger role in the decline of slasher films than actual dips audience demand. Tico Romao (2003) discovered likewise for 1970s car chase films, popularity for them had not declined, but producers chose to chase what they felt were more lucrative trends. This phenomenon surfaces numerous times in the history of zombie films. *White Zombie* (1932), for example, met with surprise box office success (Rhodes 2001: 162), but *Variety* (1932g: 9) saw its somewhat inconsistent performance as the death knell for the horror cycle. Relatedly, prospects of a 'teenage zombie cycle' for low-budget studio American International Pictures disappeared when the studio chose pursue more traditional gothic monsters in films like *I was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), *I was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), and *Blood of Dracula* (1957). Similarly, numerous

distributors passed on *Dawn of the Dead* (as they did with *Night of the Living Dead*) because they could not envision an audience for either film as noted above.

Once industry gatekeepers reify consumer tastes and demands into markets, orienting strategies are devised to create cultural objects congruent with their assessments of the audience. However, consumer demands on markets exceed their capability to provide. Latent demand often materializes in underground and/or avant-garde markets (DiMaggio 1977). This is where disreputable genres such as horror/zombie films ply their trade (Lobato and Ryan 2011). Films like *Night of the Living Dead* and *El Topo* (1970) helped define the 'midnight movie' market (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 1991). As already mentioned, the low-budget underground market for zombie flicks accelerated with the introduction of the internet and DVD which cater to the whims hardcore fans.

2.9 Sensitizing the Production of Culture

The conditions of production alone do not provide a resolute picture of cultural objects. Factors such as individual creativity, temporal conditions, and endogenous variations in cultural objects are vitally important as well (Ryan 2007). For the most part the POC approach fails to account for these important factors (Peterson and Anand 2004), though scholars working within the approach have addressed them (e.g. Isaac 2009, Lena 2006, Peterson 1997). Rather than treating these concerns as occupying a differing analytical purview, the sensitizing concepts I employ suggest these gaps in POC research are actually strongly related to aspects of production. Each sensitizing concept addresses a gap in POC literature (though this is not their sole function).

Opportunity space, for instance, addresses the issue of individual creativity by providing a rationale for how creative individuals take advantage of the institutional and

industrial opportunities available to them. Whether responding extra-industrial events such as the terrifying awe of atomic weaponry or intra-industrial events like the creative latitude afforded to producer Val Lewton at RKO in the 1940s (Bansak 2003), opportunity space helps us understand how individual creativity is buoyed or stultified by the productive apparatuses of creation (Becker 1982). Transition capacity factors in the sculpting aspects of social conditions by keying in on how shifting temporal auspices of production interact with the material auspices of production to augment or diminish the resonance of various cultural objects. Endogenous genre ecology understands that endogenous variations can occur without exogenous influence, but ecologies of imaginative innovation are strongly inculcated by the productive tools and systems at hand.

The notion that POC discounts the meaning of cultural objects (see Eyerman and Ring 1998, Gottdeiner 1985) is partially answered by my framework. In understanding a genre's transition capacity we must know how it transmutes potential meaning to audiences by attuning to how its genre ecology congeals with audience demand. Other problems such as the de-emphasis of art's specialness (see Alexander and Smith 2002) and the lack of concentration on audience reception (see Peterson and Anand 2004: 327) are not addressed in my framework. I respond by strongly paraphrasing Richard A. Peterson and N. Anand (Peterson and Anand 2004: 327). On the first count, production of culture does not dismiss the artistic value of cultural objects but suggests that they can be understood by analyzing the institutional arrangements of their creation. On the second count, the production of culture perspective distinguishes itself from reception oriented approaches, but does not diminish them as insignificant (Peterson and Anand 2004).

2.10 Conclusion

In sum, the POC perspective suggests cultural production is not simply the byproduct of a few creators reacting to an aesthetically stagnant field, nor is it simply a response to new audience demand (Peterson 1982). The perspective helps reveal a complex tapestry of mundane relations in industries that produce fantastical fare. The approach provides us purchase as to how the social organization and social relations entailed in culture creation shape whatever gets produced. POC offers an invaluable toolkit that helps show how the everyday practices of production are embedded in and shaped by a larger milieu of technological change, law and regulation, industry structure, organizational structure, careers and markets. To simply focus on consumption or reflection is to get a distorted view of society. Understanding the production of culture is necessary to understanding culture, but it is not sufficient for a full understanding. The POC perspective complements and is complemented by other approaches.

Building from the position that zombie cinema results from the complex tapestries of the filmmaking industries and broader cultural environment, the next chapter takes on the problematic concept of genre. Relatively ignored by sociology until recently (e.g. Isaac 2009, Lena 2012, Lena and Peterson 2008), genre simultaneously stands as an industrially orienting category and an ephemerally inflected discursive construct. While genre theorist Steve Neale (2000: 229) heavily touts the utility of the production of culture perspective in understanding genre:

> What is clear is that economic and industrial decisions [play a crucial part in genre constitution]. Along with the attention it seeks to give to an array of other factors and its refusal to provide answers to the questions it raises in advance of empirical analysis, it is for this reason that the production of culture perspective is much more likely than ritual or ideological theories to provide convincing accounts of the socio-cultural significance of genres and cycles.

I maintain that production of culturists must heed the lessons proffered by genre theorists to fully grasp the limits and influence of industrial and institutional forces on the production of commercially oriented cultural objects like zombie films.

Chapter 3 : Sorting Out the Viscera: Theories of Genre and Zombie Cinema

3.1 Introduction

Genres are simultaneously discursively constituted constructs that are malleable and constantly in flux as well as institutional orientations that rationalize the allocation of human and physical resources, distribution techniques, marketing campaigns, and film narratives. Delineating the influence of these countervailing forces, film theorist Rick Altman (1999: 38-39) proposes two mutually exclusive, but constitutively enmeshing processes in genre constitution: the "Critic's Game" and the "Producer's Game." The Critic's Game sees armchair analyzers probe for the commonalities of a group of films to construct a generic corpus, whereas the "Producer's Game" involves filmmakers and producers rigorously assaying successful features of differing films to insert/splice into their own in the search to strike commercial gold. Research has generally treated one hand of this process (Nowell 2011a: 15-16). Mark Jancovich (2002, 2009, 2010), James Naremore (2008), and Steve Neale (1993), on the one hand, probe into the inconsistent manner by which journalistic and trade accounts contemporaneously identify and discuss genre(s). Kevin Heffernan (2004), Ramon Lobato and Mark David Ryan (2011), Robert Kapsis (2009) and Tico Romao (2003), on the other hand, study the volatility of genres to gain insight into provincial and/or writ large industry practices. Yannis Tzioumakis (2006) implicitly and Richard Nowell (2011a) explicitly suggest a reconciliation between the two hands. Tzioumakis (2006) shows a correlative alignment between the discursive notion of "independent cinema" and the changing institutional contexts of independent

cinematic production while Nowell (2011a) demonstrates a near simultaneous discursive recognition of the slasher film and an industrial coordination of their production.

The case of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), as presented in chapter 7, offers a different sort of reconciliation. George Romero and crew did not wittingly create a zombie film; they were simply producing a "monster flick" to help fund future film projects. *Night of the Living Dead* was released in a discursive environment that recognized the ghouls, as they were understood by their creators, as zombies. Here we see a post-hoc discursive label that would later become an industrial blueprint for subsequent zombie film outings rather than a cycle of ghoul films. While post-hoc labeling practices conditioning subsequent productions are not uncommon (e.g. Altman 1999, Naremore 2008, Peterson 1997), what is not understood is how such a drastic recalibration of a genre can occur without creating an entirely new genre such as the case of slasher films (Jancovich 2002) or suspense thrillers (Kapsis 1992). Why is *Night of the Living Dead* understood as the grandfather of the modern zombie film as opposed to the dawn of ghoul film?

To this end, I identify three trends in genre theory that are relevant to understanding the evolution of zombie cinema. They include: theories pointing to the volatility of genre categorization (e.g. Erb 2009; Jancovich 2000, 2002, 2009; Mittell 2001; Naremore 2008; Neale 1993, 2000; Snelson 2009), theories highlighting the logics behind genre hybridization (Altman 1999; Gitlin 2000; Nowell 2011a, 2011b; Staiger 1997), and theories attuning to the short-term economic rationales that produce film cycles (Klein 2011; Grindon 2007, 2012; Nowell 2011a, 2013; Romao 2003; Stanfield 2010, 2011, 2013). Within each section I consider how ideas advanced in previous

chapters can enhance our understanding of each theoretical strand. Whereas genre volatility studies can be understood as part of the critic's game, hybridity and short-term economic studies can be seen as part of the producer's game. The production of culture perspective, as discussed in the previous chapter, offers a workable analytic framework to capture the molding influences of the material conditions of production, but developments in genre theory provide the necessary orientating minutia for the task. However, before discussing each research thread in genre theory I will first elucidate on the definition of genre, consider how zombie films are understood as a genre and unpack the industrial foundation of genre production.

3.2 Defining Genre

Barry Keith Grant (2007: 1) defines film genres as "those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations." Colloquially understood, film genres "are ways of grouping movies by style and story" (Berry-Flint 2004: 25). Rick Altman (1999: 216-225) suggests genre character derives from its interplay between semantics (ambiance/settings) and syntax (themes). Jason Mittell (2001), in contrast, understands genre as the outcome of extra-textual categorical practices. Sometimes subgenre is employed to "refer to specific traditions or groupings within … genres" (Neale 2000: 9). The term cycle is occasionally used as well to describe "cultural ephemera cranked out to capitalize on current events, trends, fads, and the success of other films" (Klein 2011: 6). Others employ the term cluster to describe the coterminous production of genre films that exhibit no narrative links (see Grindon 2007, 2012). While scholars may disagree on the precise definition of genre or the appropriately terminology to use (e.g. genre, subgenre, cycles, trends, film-

types), they largely agree that popular cinema is arranged and discussed according to generic categories – science fiction, horror, thrillers, melodramas, film noir, and the like (Grant 2007, Labato and Ryan 2011, Maltby 2003: 74-108). Genre operates as both a critical term and a collection of orienting categories that have proven fecund to understanding film as both art and industrial artifact (Grant 2012). Genre is not an immutable quality of a text, but offers sets of intra- and inter-textual relations for viewers and producers (Berry-Flint 2004: 41, Naremore 2008). Likewise, genre formation results from a constellation of social activities revolving around texts; it is not an inherent quality to an individual text (Mittell 2001).

Nearly all studies on genre or genre films confront the problem of definition and deciphering where the boundaries of one genre end and another begins. Early genre studies attempted to produce taxonomic descriptions of particular genres encountering what Andrew Tudor (2012: 4-5) termed the "empiricist dilemma" or the attempt to distill generic character by imposing preconfigured definitions onto a group of preselected films. A related problem – often seen in studies of zombie films – is take one period of as representative of a genre and develop theories of generic essences from those examples (Jancovich 2002: 8). Jancovich (ibid.) argues such boundary fixing efforts obfuscate genres' innate flexibility, impreciseness, and ephemerality and potentially risks imposing "understandings from the present on the past." Recent studies understand genres as indiscrete systems lacking universalistic fixed lists of motifs; instead they are seen as discursive structures variably interplayed in mainstream cinema (cf. Gledhill 2007, Mittell 2001, Naremore 2008, Neale 2007a). Genre verisimilitudes – the expectations of a genre – are never rigidly defined or adhered to, but are subject to a constant process of

change, adaptation, reinterpretation, and (re)deployment (Cherry 2009: 14-19; Jancovich 2002, 2009; Maltby 2003: 74-108; Mittell 2001; Neale 1993, 2000). It thus becomes appropriate to understand the provincial aspects of genre constitution as well as their long term constructions and sustainability.

Altman (1999: 14) argues that traditional understandings of genre actually encompass four different meanings, including: "Genre as blueprint, as a formula that precedes, programmes and patterns industry production … as structure, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded … as label, as the name of a category central to the decisions and communications of distributors and exhibitors … as contract, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience." To paraphrase scholars like Brigid Cherry (2009: 3-4), Amanda Ann Klein (2011), and Richard Nowell (2011a) we should not think of genre as a distinct, unified set of films with shared conventions, but a collection of related processes including: cycles, hybrids, and social constructs. What is needed is an approach that recognizes genre as an industrial process operating at both the short-term and long-term levels and a discursive process that is subject to sudden change and reconfiguration. In utilizing the production of culture perspective described in the previous chapter in tandem with the sensitizing concepts, opportunity space, transition capacity, and endogenous genre ecology, I aim to produce an account attentive to temporalized production practices, contemporaneous cinematic trends, industry conceptualization of market, and discursive labeling attributions. Understanding the theoretical trends discussed below is fundamental to this project, but I now shift my focus to understanding zombies as a genre to couch the remaining discussion.

3.3 Zombie Cinema as Genre

Nearly all commentators view zombie films as a subgenre of horror films (cf. Cherry 2009: 6, Kawin 2012: 118-125, Hutchings 2008: 345-347), though they are often idiomatically referred to as a genre – I principally employ genre for the sake of clarity. Likewise, nearly all agree the monster has undergone a tremendous evolution in its eighty-plus year cinematic history (Bishop 2010a; Dendle 2001, 2007; Hutchings 2008: 345-347; Kawin 2012: 118-125; McIntosh 2008; Moreman 2010; Mulligan 2009; Muntean and Payne 2009; Pulliam 2007; Richardson 2010: 121-136; Russell 2006). Most historiographies track the zombie back to US American misappropriations of Haitian spiritual practices (Bishop 2006, 2008, 2010a: 37-63; Dendle 2001: 4-7; 2007: 45-48; Kawin 2012: 118-120; McAlister 2012; McIntosh 2008: 1-6; Moreman 2010: 264-268; Pulliam 2007: 724-730; Richardson 2010: 121-128; Russell 2006: 9-17), but some go further back to the New Testament Book of Daniel (e.g. Mulligan 2009: 350, Toppe 2011).

Unlike other silver screen monsters, the zombie is distinctly non-European in origin and mostly lacking a prior literary heritage (Bishop 2006, 2010a; Dendle 2001; McAlister 2012; Pulliam 2007; Richardson 2010). Though the 'zonbi/zombi' is a very real figure to many Haitians (Davis 1985, 1988; Hron 2009: 135-184; McAlister 2012), filmmakers exploiting Haitian folklife have "shown little interest in anthropologically rigorous approaches to Haitian culture or Religion. They have taken the concept of the zombie, the mindless walking dead, and run with it" (Kawin 2012: 118). Indeed, the zombie's lack of literary heritage (Bishop 2006; Dendle 2001: 2-3), I demonstrate in later chapters, gave it an endogenous genre ecology that allowed producers to take "liberties

with the legend, displaying an irreverence that would have been unthinkable towards respected contemporary properties such as *Dracula* or *Frankenstein*" (Russell 2006: 27). It did not take long for inconsistencies to appear in the blueprint. Previously associated with Haiti, *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936) places zombies in Cambodia, *Love Wanga* (1934) in an unnamed Caribbean island, *The Ghost Breakers* (1940) in Cuba, and *Voodoo Island* (1957) in Hawaii. The zombie also appeared in numerous radio serials, comics, novels, and short stories during the 1930s where they were capable of speech and complex thought (Hand 2011, Pulliam 2007, Vials 2011).

Zombies developed as monster that was "easy to … transplant" (McIntosh 2008: 6) into a variety of settings and to corporeally construct. By the 1940s, the zombie had come stateside in *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943). The creature largely faded into the background throughout the early-1950s, appearing, when it did, as a background character (Dendle 2001, Hutchings 2008, McIntosh 2008). The still somnambulistic, not yet lifeless, zombie found new life in the pages of comics in the 1950s (Pulliam 2007: 733), but also in a few science fiction and teenpic films (see chapter 6). It was mostly within the panels of the pages of comic books that the idea of the modern zombie began to bloom (Pulliam 2007: 733, Wells 2000: 82), but see chapter 6 for a challenge. Scholars examining zombie cinema regard the 1950s and early-1960s as a transitional period for the genre, producing mostly insignificant zombie features (Dendle 2001: 4-7, 2007: 49-50; Russell 2006: 47-54). Dendle (2001) and Russell (2006) argue that fascination with the word continued as interest to its "Caribbean" heritage waned. As Dendle (2001: 4) puts it, the term took on a "range of creatures and altered states of conscious" during this

period. As the transmuting zombie shuffled into the 1960s, its appearance was looking less like its original form.

Night of the Living Dead was a game-changer for films concerning the living dead, helping inaugurate zombies as we know them today. Its success helped popularize the civilization ending zombie narrative that I opened the study with (Bishop 2010a: 94-128; Dendle 2001: 7-8, 2007: 50-52; Hutchings 2008: 347; Kawin 2012: 120-125; McIntosh 2008: 8-10; Moreman 2010: 270-273; Mulligan 2009: 358-361; Muntean and Payne 2009: 245-246; Paffenroth 2006: 2-7; Pulliam 2007: 734-739; Richardson 2010: 121-136; Russell 2006: 64-70). Romero-influenced narratives rarely give audiences a sanguine ending; humans cannot work through their differences, we are doomed to living in a zombie run planet. Through texts like *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), zombies become metaphors of the provincialisms and parochialisms of the human condition; "they're us, and we're them."

Despite relative widespread agreement over the historiography described above, airtight definitions of zombies are hard to come by. According to Dendle (2001: 13), "the substantial overlap among the various movie monsters precludes the possibility of an all-encompassing definition of a zombie." It may also be added that the zombie's intramonster inconsistency, also obfuscates a universal definition of the creature. It is, therefore, unsurprising to note that considerable debate exists over what films to include in filmographies. Michael Richardson (2010: 121) argues that zombies have diverged so much from their original manifestation that "we are really speaking of two different creatures." Bruce Kawin (2012: 118) makes a similar point, positing "there are two kinds of zombies." The different creatures both authors speak of are the zombies influenced by

misappropriations of Haitian spiritual culture and the zombies derivative of *Night of the Living Dead*. Christopher Moreman (2010: 269-70) argues these creatures have nothing in common, but "that viewers and critics labeled [both] as zombies is important in its own right." My task is not necessarily to propose a concrete definition of the monster that refuses stay six-feet-under, but to understand its ephemeral blueprint as it circulates through cycles of production, discursive reconstitutions, and hybridized logics of production. We must escape explanations centered solely on single individuals and influential texts which becloud the industrial contexts shaping cultural production. We must understand genres as percolating from both economic and social processes (Kapsis 2009, Neale 2012, Nowell 2011a, Romao 2003).

3.4 Genre and the Film Industries

Richard Maltby (2003: 74) quips "Hollywood is a generic cinema, which is not the same thing as saying that it is a cinema of genres." While producers and advertisers of films past and present – for the most part – attempt to avoid strict generic attributions of their films (Altman 1999, King 2002: 116-146, Staiger 1997), genres provided one of the earliest mechanisms used by the filmmaking industries to organize the production, marketing, and exhibition of films (Altman 1999, Gledhill 2007, Grant 2007). Genre labels such as western, musical, drama, or comedy serve as communicative relays between producers and viewers that portend expectations, but also involve structuring structures and capital deployment affixed to individual generic texts. Generic production emerged from the contradictory demands of standardization and differentiation (Altman 1999, Gledhill 2007, Grant 2007, Neale 2000, Staiger 1997). Genres serve to undergird

the mainstream film industries because they are the orienting units around which production and exhibition are organized (Cherry 2009: 14-19, Maltby 2003: 74).

By replicating successful features in prior pictures, the coalescence of genres allows producers and other creative personnel to anticipate consumer demand by packaging something familiar with something new (Altman 1999: 128-129, Gledhill 2007). Genres become dependable product lines safeguarding the massive mobilization of assets involved in creating new films (Gitlin 2000, Grant 2007, Neale 2000). In a sense, they afford a tenuous balance between the sameness and assurance desired by producers and the differentiation and familiarity desired by the audience (Altman 1999, Gledhill 2007, Grant 2007, Neale 2000). In the words of Steve Neale (2000: 232), genres allow studios to "regulate demand and the nature of its product in such a way as to minimise the risks inherent in difference and to maximise the possibility of profit on its overall investment." Because individual genres share textual similarities, their blueprints enable filmmakers to efficiently and cost-effectively produce new generic outings (Grant 2007, Neale 2012). Genres brought standardization into filmmaking by allowing studios to "reliably create small differences within the particulars of each movie, even while it remains generally within the standard genre model" (Monaco 2010: 17). Within the studio system genres provided orientations for factory-like production of new films akin to Fordian manufacturing which assembled new fare with interchangeable parts (Balio 1993; Monaco 2010: 16-18; Neale 2000: 233-242; Schatz 1997, 2010; Staiger 1997).

The existence of genres underscores the fact that filmmaking functions as a moneymaking enterprise with each film intended to turn a tidy profit. According to genre theorist Rick Altman (1999: 64), "the constitution of film cycles and genres is a never-

ceasing process, closely tied to the capitalist need for product differentiation." Generic production is the product of collective, routinized activity cobbled together through fundamentally economic relations and institutional pressures. Christine Gledhill (2007: 257) argues "[g]eneric production grew out of the attempt to repeat and build on initial successes." Genres vitiate the extreme uncertainty faced by interorganizational gatekeepers in determining congruence between economic success and present/future audience taste (Bielby and Bielby 1994, Gitlin 2000). Genres limit the risks associated with new productions often at the expense of maximizing reward (Altman 1999). Because genres are bound to evanescent economic concerns and recognized through social processes they can never be stable, genres are, as the next section explicates, volatile; that is, they are always subject to change and re-evaluation.

3.5 Genre Volatility

Steve Neale (2012: 187) argues "genres are inherently temporal: hence, their inherent mutability on the one hand and their inherent historicity on the other." Scholars have routinely demonstrated a lack of harmony between generic label and generic corpus, even coevally (e.g. Jancovich 2009, Naremore 2008, Neale 1993, Snelson 2009). Genre volatility exists primarily for two reasons. First, studios and producers have shown little regard for establishing clear borders around individual genres (Altman 1999, Austin 2002, Hutchings 2004: 5-9, Naremore 2008, Neale 2003, Staiger 1997). Second, critics and sometimes even audiences demonstrate a lack concern for generic purity (Hutchings 2004: 5-9, Jancovich 2009, Naremore 2008, Neale 1993; but see Austin 2002, Jancovich 2000). As James Naremore (2008: 6) demonstrates "every movie is transgeneric and

polyvalent." No movie is pure, but, in fact, can and does belong to multiple genres (Altman 1999, Staiger 1997, Naremore 2008, Neale 2000).

From the industry side, Altman (1999: 59-60) contends that studios shy away from definitive generic claims making, choosing instead to imply multiple generic affiliations to attract individuals recognizing the vestiges of a desired genre (see also Austin 2002; Klein 2011: 188-189; Nowell 2011a: 107-147, 2011b: 34-37). (This industry practice also leads to the tendency of hybridization which is discussed below.) According to Naremore (2008: 11) genre operates as "a loose evolving system of arguments and readings that helps to shape commercial strategies and aesthetic ideologies" (see also Mittell 2001). On the side of reviewers/audience members, genre labeling is, likewise, often inconsistent. Snelson (2009), for instance, evinces how films considered as 'woman's films' today were discussed contemporaneously as horror films. Neale (1993), similarly, shows how the term melodrama originally connoted action filled 'masculine' films rather than emotionally charged 'feminine' films. This indicates that both social memories (Neale 2003: 171) and social histories of genres (Jancovich 2002: 7-10) may also add to the volatility of generic corpuses. Jancovich (2002: 7) points out, for example, "most academic histories [of horror] include films that were not originally produced or consumed as horror films, and are defined as horror only retrospectively." Elsewhere, in his analysis of 1940s horror reception, Jancovich (2010: 45) posits "[i]f some are no longer defined as horror today, recognition of the generic status of these films during the 1940s is not only vital to an appreciation of the magnitude and character of the 1940s horror cycle, but also to the critical reception of horror in the period." Relatedly, Cythnia Erb (2009) tracks the contemporaneous and contemporary appraisals

of King Kong and *King Kong* (1933) showing the giant ape took on different meanings at different times and to different audiences. Similarly, with the passage of time exhibitors and markets can regenrify a film to audiences. In a rather extreme example, Peter Hutchings (2004: 8) notes that during the 1950s classic horror films like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* were advertised as science fiction films to capitalize on the successes of science fiction films.

Leaving aside the issue of genesis for the moment, Neale (2012) and Grindon (2012) observe that each new genre film necessarily adds to a generic corpus by differentiating itself from past expressions, but they also draw from a repertoire of potential elements without fully exhausting them. Elements within a generic repertoire can reach an inertial stage and all but disappear from its endogenous genre ecology (e.g. zombie cinema's link to voodoo) while other elements that started out rare may become commonplace to its ecology (e.g. zombie cinema's penchant for flesheating monsters or its now ubiquitous deployment of an apocalyptic narrative) (Grindon 2012: 55-57). Neale (2000: 218-219) also mentions that the minute differences introduced by new genre are still largely understudied and misunderstood by genre scholars. Here I wish to suggest that my sensitizing concept of endogenous genre ecology can shed invaluable light on the situation. Understanding that genres are never definitively defined and are always in process, endogenous genre ecology – an ephemeralized blueprint and its amenability to change – specifies the bounds of genre reinterpretation and repackaging. It reminds us that limitations exist on corpus meanderings.

Zombie cinema offers the perfect foil for this undertaking given their well-established barometric sensitivity to macrosocial oscillations. Both the industry practice

of genre obscuration and inconsistent genre attribution by reviewers and fans materialize in zombie films. Rather than making the mistake of being strictly taxonomic, establishing a temporalized endogenous genre ecology is partially taxonomic by detailing the genre's blueprint at important junctures in its development. It understands that generic boundaries are never fixed, but nonetheless have determinable verisimilitudes. To paraphrase sociologist Max Weber (1946: 280) changing material relations may drive genre production, but ideas of genre have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which those material relations are directed. That is, endogenous genre ecologies are not deterministic, but constrictive and directive. Understanding a genre's ecology at one juncture as conditioned by material and ideational relations can help sociologically specify corpus change (Romao 2003), but can also signify subsequent ecological possibilities as later chapters will demonstrate.

3.6 Generic Hybridity

Rejecting purity theses, scholars increasingly respect that motion pictures have always been hybrid and re-combinative in practice (Altman 1999, Gledhill 2007, Grant 2007, Neale 2000). Filmmakers and producers, particularly profit minded filmmakers and producers, regularly attempt to expand the potential audience for a particular film typically by isolating successful elements from previous hits and economically salable genres into new films (Altman 1999: 38-39, 128-132, Maltby 2003: 14-15, Nowell 2011a). Films that can appeal to multiple taste publics through this process of recombination are conceptualized to be maximizing their box-office potential (Altman 1999, Maltby 2003, Neale 2000, Nowell 2011a, Staiger 1997). However, this process can

backfire as generic dilution can alienate audience members the hybridization process attempted to capture (Austin 2002).

Authors in both sociology (Gitlin 2000, Lopes 2009) and film studies (Altman 1999, Neale 2000, Nowell 2011a, 2011b, Staiger 1997) agree on the logic of hybridization wherein culture producers assume that "selected features of recent hits can be spliced together to make a eugenic success" (Gitlin 2000: 75). That is, two or more generic elements are combined into a single film (e.g. combining elements of romance and comedy for a romantic comedy) to broaden its box-office appeal and potential. However, there are bounds of disagreement as to the nature and constitution of hybridity. For instance, Altman (1999), Gitlin (2000), Neale (2000), Staiger (1997) characterize hybridity as a centripetally repurposive process of homogenization that institutionally processes consumer demand for novelty without excessive exposure to capital risk. Lopes (2009) and Nowell (2011a, 2011b), in contrast, see hybridity as an agentically opportunistic practice of culling and combining a multiplicity of sources into a unique project that hopefully garners from enough of the public to make it profitable. The former view is said to emanate from the major production studios while the latter is said to originate from independent producers.

I show that both views of hybridity are correct. While both camps develop the procedural logics for hybridization on their side of the argument, they seemingly turn a blind-eye to the other. The sensitizing concepts I introduced in the first chapter can help specify differing rationales for hybridity by reminding us that hybridization is a term that encompasses a welter of industrial practices. When hybridization functions as an institutionally homogenizing process one of two bureaucratically ordained materialistic

procedures may be operating. First, hybridization may occur reflexively as part of normal operating procedure such as Janet Staiger's (1997) example of the regular infusion of romance plots into studio era motion pictures or the cases I discuss in chapter 5. In these situs, the discursive environment of a film's release can help distinguish the genre of designation; whether a comedy film has horrific elements in it (e.g. *Zombies on Broadway* [1945]) or whether horror film has comedic elements in it (e.g. *Dawn of the Dead*). Second, hybridization can result from calculated decisions on the part of interorganizational gatekeepers such as Gitlin's (2000) discussion of constructing new primetime television shows or some the bigger-budgeted zombie films briefly considered in the conclusion. Here we can see how genres are recalibrated to transition into the material auspices of a particular productive milieu. Genuine hybridized creativity is not beyond the purview of the major studio, however, but, Lisa De Propris and Laura Hypponen (2008) conjecture it is heavily restricted and circumscribed. Studios may even order filmmakers to splice hybridized elements into their films. For instance, Robert Kapsis (2009: 8-9) recounts how *Fear No Evil* (1981) started out as a love story and wound up a horror film when Avco Embassy (a 'major independent') determined the film could sell better by injecting slasher-like elements into it. That is, studios may willfully pursue trends with the same vigor as smaller indies.

When hybridization becomes the creative tool of cultural entrepreneurs we can usually notice the opening of an opportunity space somewhere. In one instance, cultural creators may take advantage extra-industrial historical events or opportunity spaces by synthesizing them into a single film such as Nowell's (2011b) industrial-textual analysis of *Friday the 13th* (1980) or the example of *White Zombie* (1932) offered in the next

chapter. In another instance, filmmakers wittingly or unwittingly produce a hybridized picture that manages to find an audience without specifically targeting unsated taste publics such as the case of *Night of the Living Dead*. Whether the hybrid chases industry trends or bucks them, most filmmakers pursue specified goals and employ certain strategies to achieve them which are typically provincial in nature.

3.7 Short-Term Economic Strategies

Zombie films, like other horror films, aim at inducing fear and/or abjection in potential viewers (Carroll 1990). Because of this, coetaneous issues such as social upheaval, sociopolitical, environmental, and scientific anxieties, conflicts, wars, crime, and violence absorb into horror cinema's narratives. In part, this is why societal reflection approaches have achieved analytic orthodoxy in the study of zombie films (Platts forthcoming*a*). However, concentrating solely on the barometric capture of macrosocial processes elides the networks of human and institutional relations involved in their assemblage; it ignores the material foundation of production, the fact that most films are made to make money. Peter Hutchings (2004: 15) argues horror films, like all forms of cinema is "a vulgar commercial reality, and any account of horror cinema needs to engage with the brute forces of the market."

In unraveling the first wave of slasher films Richard Nowell (2011a, b, c) offers a stepwise account of genre development wherein genres evolve through distinct phases of collective activity which respond to industrial developments, market shifts, and changing commercial logics that undergird the production and distribution of generic offerings. In Nowell's argument new genres are inaugurated by pioneer productions which set forth an experimental new textual model, opportunistic filmmakers may strongly copy this textual

model in speculator productions. If a speculator production becomes a hit it often inspires a prospector cash-in to piggyback on a particular speculator production's commercial successes. Moneymaking speculator productions become reinforcing hits which entice a host of carpetbagger cash-ins. A glut of carpetbagger cash-ins causes market saturation and a large-scale commercial abandonment of a once viable film cycle. What my sensitizing concepts can add to Nowell's model is a further specification of institutional structurations on filmmaking practices. Opportunity space, for instance, can provide enhanced specification on why producers would pursue one genre trend over another. Transition capacity can augment our understanding as to why some genres curry favor at particular times and, most importantly, in particular places (e.g. the mainstream film market, the straight-to-video market).

Though the institutions of culture creation resist change (Peterson 1997), it is also true that filmmakers whether attached to a major studio or not – for the most part – care naught for the long-term stability of any particular genre (see Klein 2011). Filmmakers tend to privilege cinematic productions that produce profits in the here-and-now not in the potential future. Because of this we see the workings of all three sensitizing concepts permeating through the short-term goals of productions and later chapters show.

3.8 Conclusion

Despite the issues highlighted above, because genres serve to institutionalize conduct and manage risk in a highly uncertain culture producing industry, they are an ideal nodal point to extract insight into the social logic and decision-making processes the filmmaking industries (Nowell 2012b). Likewise, focusing on industry conduct can sharpen our insight into the constitution and reconstitution of genres. The ensuing

chapters breakup the evolution of the zombie genre into discrete developmental phases and rendered comprehensible via the production of culture perspective as informed through transition capacity, opportunity space, endogenous genre ecology and the trends of genre theory discussed in this chapter. The first analytic chapter focuses on the genesis and early development of early zombie cinema. Rather than being solely wrenched from US American's xenophobic imagination, as is usually claimed, the emergence the zombie film was the product of an opportunity space opened by parallel industrial trends and the tactics of a small group of shrewd, experienced filmmakers looking to make it big.

Chapter 4 : "Unusual Times Demand Unusual Pictures": The Industrial Genesis and Development of Zombie Cinema

4.1 Monster of *The Magic Island*? Introduction

In this chapter I examine the emergence and early development of zombie cinema, focusing mostly on the circumstances behind the production of *White Zombie* (1932) – cinema's first feature-length zombie film. The major point I wish to convey is that the emergence of the zombie cinema was not, as suggested by others, a direct byproduct of US-Haitian relations via the adaptation of a high-profile book, but was a coterminous product of this development, along with general industrial factors and the strategies of entrepreneurial filmmakers. While reflectionist accounts provide an invaluable peek into the United States' long-running tendency "to project its fantasies and insecurities onto the recently independent black state [Haiti]" (Dash 1997: 2), they are not enough to explain how zombies reached the silver screen. If interest US in Haiti reached its peak in 1929 as suggested by Hans Schmidt (1995), Mary Renda (2001), and J. Michael Dash (1997), then why was *White Zombie* released three years after the fact? If William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* served as source material for *White Zombie,* as assumed by a majority of scholars, then why are there so many differences between the two texts? If the studios hired staff to monitor literary and cultural trends, as maintained by Tino Balio (1993: 100-101), then why was *The Magic Island* which sold 500,000 copies and was promoted by the prestigious book club the Literary Guild ignored by them? Relatedly, why was *White Zombie* produced by low-budget independent filmmakers, not a major studio given the high level of curiosity in Haitian culture?

To answer these questions we need to move beyond discussions of how current events and broader social forces inspire localized popular cultural content and what that may indicate of a society and toward a more situated approach sensitive to the industrial logics and strategies underpinning content mobilization. Thus, in this chapter I emphasize how zombie films emerged in 1932 as part of a burgeoning cycle of horror films (Rhodes 2001: 89-95), how *White Zombie* borrowed content from previously successful films and trends to enhance its chances of being purchased by a major studio, how *The Magic Island* offered little in the way of exploitable qualities upon which to base a coherent feature-length film, and how the creators of early zombie films responded to industrial trends when producing their film. As my analysis in this chapter demonstrates and later ones make more explicit, these processes concocted a silver screen monster with a hazily conscribed endogenous genre ecology that allowed for rampant re-imaginings and textual recognitions of it.

While *White Zombie* was a surprise success at the box office, zombies failed to take off in the form of more zombie films despite their apparent popularity and flexibility. Controversies surrounding *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936) and *Love Wanga* (1934) as they hamstrung subsequent development of zombie films are considered in the latter parts of this chapter, points I pick up again in chapter 5. I conclude this chapter by inventorying zombie cinema's early endogenous genre ecology as set by its three earliest films and influenced other popular cultural manifestations of zombies such as the ones broadcast over radio. My argument demonstrates the heuristic purchase of the sensitizing concepts discussed in chapter 1 as they functioned to gestate then stall the development

of zombie films. The chapter begins, however, by documenting how zombies entered the US American consciousness.

4.2 Origins of the Zombie Idea in Western Popular Culture

When compared to their horrific contemporaries like *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932) zombies are a real oddity. Where other early horror films derived from stage adaptations of European or American novels (Balio 1993: 298-299, Gomery 1996, Hutchings 2004: 11-13), zombies, according to Peter Dendle (2001: 3), "pass[ed] directly from [Haitian] folklore to the screen, without first having an established literary tradition." To say that zombies passed "directly" from Haiti to the United States is a bit of a misnomer, however, as the Haitian zonbi/zombi has little in common with its counterparts in western popular culture (see Ackermann and Gauthier 1991, Koven 2008: 37-50, McAlister 2012). It is important to insist that zonbis/zombis entered the US American imagination as a result of vituperative relations with Haiti, but these relations did not solely constitute the "zombie" as it was portrayed audiences – the extant material auspices of production also played a pivotal part. This is not to deny the existence of racism or xenophobia in early zombie films, far too many examples of each can be easily documented (see especially Bishop 2010a: 37-63, Richardson 2010: 121-128, Russell 2006: 19-46), but to warn against a conflation of the temporal inspirations of filmmaking (i.e. exploiting interest in Haiti and zombies) with material logics of filmmaking (i.e. producing a film about Haiti and zombies that will be watched). I therefore use this section to examine how US-Haitian relations brought US American attention to the zonbi/zombi before it was transformed into the zombie.

Haiti's history is complex and often violent (and tragic). In 1804 it became the second sovereign nation-state in the Western Hemisphere and the first (and only) to result from a successful slave revolt. In the century before, it was known as Saint Domingue, France's wealthiest colony responsible for supplying much of the globe's sugar and cotton and significant amounts of indigo, coffee, tobacco, and hides (Chomsky 1993: 197-200). The slave system in Haiti was brutal, necessitating the shipment of more slaves to Haiti than anywhere else in the world due to high morality and low birth rates (Girard 2010: 26). Revolts were common, but the movement that ultimately led to Haiti's independent began in 1791 (Girard 2010, Moreman 2010). When Haiti finally won its independence it sent shockwaves through the United States triggering reactionary responses from the press replete with unchallenged stories of sacrifice, blood rituals, and cannibalism (Chomsky 1993: 197-200, Jordan 1974: 147-148, Moreman 2010).

Writings of zombies for western audiences date back to Haiti's revolutionary period (1791-1804) with Moreau de Saint-Méry glossing over them in his 1797 travelogues (McAlister 2012: 459), but it was a set of circumstances in the latter phases of the United States' 1915-1934 military occupation of Haiti that brought zombies to the attention of US Americans. The occupation, which resulted from an effort to neutralize European influence in the Western Hemisphere and was justified as a humanitarian mission, went relatively unnoticed until a series of Haitian student and peasant protests sparked US American interests in Haitian culture (Renda 2001, Schmidt 1995). Feeling they could profit from the sudden spike in curiosity, a number of journalists and military personnel published travelogues regarding their trips to Haiti, some of which included zombies (Dash 1997: 51); the most important for my analysis being *The Magic Island*.

Despite a number of popular writings postdating Moreau de Saint-Méry and predating *The Magic Island* (Haining 1985: 7-20, Rhodes 2001: 72-78), *The Magic Island* is credited with popularizing and introducing the idea of "zombies" to US Americans (Bishop 2010a, Dendle 2001, Richardson 2010: 121-126).

Adapting zombies as portrayed in *The Magic Island* to the silver screen or stage, however, posed serious problems. Seabrook's ([1929] 1989: 92-103) description of zombies, contained almost entirely in a single chapter, was exceptionally vague and gave tremendous latitude interpretations of them. *The Magic Island* was also structured as a series of loosely-connected events which did not lend themselves to the narrative style that dominated film production at the time (see Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985). Containing lurid details of nude orgies, blood rituals, and sacrifices, the book likewise had scenes that were too violent or sexually charged for early-1930s censors, particularly illustrations depicting nude orgies and blood rituals. *The Magic Island*'s high-profile status likely brought it to the attention of studio staffs who kept abreast of exploitable trends (Balio 1993: 100-101), but the necessary cultural labor required to turn *The Magic Island* into salable film commodity preempted the text from transitioning into the studios' material auspices. As I discuss later, brothers Victor and Edward Halperin and scriptwriter Garnett Weston altered the "zombie" to such an extent that folklorist Mikel J. Koven (2008: 37-50) concluded the cinematic zombie has almost nothing in common with its ethnographic analogue.

Some tried to profit from zombies early on, but these initial attempts at transforming zombies into popular cultural commodities failed, cautioning mainstream interest in making films about the Caribbean boogeyman. In early 1932, for example,

Kenneth Webb produced a stageplay entitled *Zombie* (1932) that closed in a matter of months (Rhodes 2001: 70-71). Just one year prior, two short films featuring zombies were released with little fanfare – one as part of Walter Futter's documentary series, *Curiosities* (1931), the other *Song of the Voodoo* (1931) was a nine-minute documentary produced by RKO. Regardless of these initial failures, Gary Rhodes (2001: 87) argues they proved pivotal in the production of *White Zombie* because they "implied that voodoo and zombies were fertile ground for continued experiments in the entertainment world." That notwithstanding, basing a feature-length film around a little known monster whose first attempts at commercialization faltered made its trip to the silver screen anything but inevitable. That Webb's play flopped almost certainly disqualified it from the portfolios of major studios who emphasized market safe films based off of presold properties (Balio 1993: 98-103, Gomery 1996, Hutchings 2004: 11-14) and that could be produced in formulaically similar manners (Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger 1985; Staiger 1997). Other would-be prospectors should have been weary as well. To understand the emergence of zombie cinema we must account for the alignment of historical and material forces that made it a possibility (i.e. its opportunity space). Beyond that, we must understand the production strategies of the entrepreneurs who conceived and completed the first zombie film. Who would venture enormous capital risk in such an unproven commodity? But more importantly, how did they alter zombies into a trafficable filmic text that was ultimately distributed by United Artists, one of Hollywood's major studios!?

4.3 The Emergence of Zombie Cinema: *White Zombie* (Opportunity Space)

Appearing in the July 26, 1932 edition of *Variety* (1932e), the first advertisement for *White Zombie* read "Unusual Times Demand Unusual Pictures" (*Variety* 1932e). The

"unusual times" part of the tagline could have easily referred to a number of phenomena present at the time, from the despair and hopelessness felt by many Americans living through the Great Depression to piqued (if by that point waning) interests in Haitian culture to the state of the film industry itself. *White Zombie* undoubtedly preyed upon the hyperbolic curiosities toward Caribbean cultures shared by many US Americans as evidenced by the advertisement's use of an "Actual Abstract From the Penal Code of Haiti" (*Variety* 1932e). The figure of the zombie may have also tapped into the mentalité of the American worker as David J. Skal (2001: 168-169) points out "[t]he shuffling spectacle of the walking dead in films like *White Zombie* (1932) was in many ways a nightmare vision of a breadline." *White Zombie*'s release, however, cannot be explained broader social currents alone; we must unweave the constellation of industrial factors that aligned to provide the necessary opportunity space to make a zombie film a possibility (though not an inevitability).

In early 1932, when production on *White Zombie* commenced, the film industry was controlled by eight motion picture companies collectively known as the Big Five (Loew's, Paramount, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros., and RKO) and the Little Three (Universal, Columbia, and United Artists) which are explored in greater detail next chapter. The Big Five were vertically integrated companies who produced their own films in their own studios, marketed their own films, and exhibited their own films (as well films from the other eight majors) in their own theaters largely at the exclusion of independent filmmakers. Universal and Columbia of the Little Three were partially integrated in that they produced and distributed their own films, but did not own any theaters. United Artists, in contrast to the other seven, just distributed films, but had close

connections with the seven. For the most part the majors produced films entirely in-house and seldom opened their doors to independent filmmakers. Estimates by Douglas Gomery (2005: 2) suggest the eight majors produced as many as three-quarters of all films made while raking in 90 percent of all ticket sales.

Instead of reacting to piquing curiosities surrounding the Haitian occupation or the temperament of the Great Depression, the creators behind *White Zombie* responded industry reports that Hollywood's major studios were in the market for "quality product from small producers" (*Film Daily* 1931: 1) and the growing confidence of Hollywood gatekeepers in horror films on account of *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein*'s (1931) surprising box-office (see Merrick 1932, Shaffer 1932). Studios were interested in outside product because of rising production costs (which were connected to the transition to sound), the loss of sound pictures' novelty (which temporarily staved off the effects the Great Depression), the prevalence of double billing (discussed in greater detail in the following chapter), and the Great Depression itself (Balio 1993: 13-36, Rhodes 2001: 88-89). These trends collectively created an opportunity space for independent producers to potentially exploit with industry trade publications running headlines that announced "Independents Facing Their Greatest Opportunity" (Hoffman 1931), "Big Distribs in Market for Indie Films" (*Film Daily* 1931), and "Independents Find Studio Field Ripe" (*Motion Picture Herald* 1931b). *Variety* (1932a) went so far as to ask, in early-1932, "Will or Must Pictures Go Independent?" *Film Daily* (1931: 8) even cited numerous industry insiders over their willingness to acquire outside productions provided they conformed to "the production standards" of the studio. Industry reporter Don Gillette (1931: 1) noted "the individual with ideas, originality, showman's sense and

enterprise is on the threshold of some of the best opportunities in a decade." Concurrent to increasing studio readiness to buy completed films, they also expressed a growing interest in horror films which were beginning to coalesce into a full-blown cycle by early 1932 (Merrick 1932, Naylor 2011, Shaffer 1932). Just a few months earlier the commercial prospects of horror films were uncertain. Shortly after *Dracula*'s surprisingly strong box office *Variety* (1931: 2) observed, "[p]roducers are not certain whether nightmare pictures have a box office pull, or whether *Dracula* is just a freak … [t]o date, no other studio has tried to follow in [Universal's] steps, one of the few occasions when a hit wasn't followed by a cycle of similar pictures." The financial successes of *Dracula, Frankenstein,* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* likely fuelled the Victor and Edward Halperin's interest in the emerging cycle, as Gary Rhodes (2001:232) has argued because they signaled the willingness on the part of the major studios to purchase for distribution a bankable independently produced horror film in order to mine the evident popularity of the material. Carefully crafted for studio approval and latching onto the emerging horror cycle, *White Zombie* was produced by shrewd businessmen who had worked for the studios, and who were positioned to grasp the opportunities that were reported to be opening up for independent filmmakers in 1931 and 1932. Unlike most of their peers, Victor Halperin, Edward Halperin, and scriptwriter Garnett Weston boasted connections to New York investors who provided a loan between $50,000 and $62,500 to make *White Zombie* (Rhodes 2001: 91); a large sum of money a for a picture that did not have a distribution deal in place (Jacobs 1934: X4) and which would provide an advantage in bringing *White Zombie*'s production values to parity with studio films, and therefore increasing its odds of being purchased.

The Halperins promoted themselves as "movie engineers" who drew up graphs of successful films in order to assist in the assembly of what they hoped would be "fail proof" pictures (*Syracuse Herald* 1927: 18; McManus 1936: X3). *White Zombie* represented a calculated attempt on their part to capitalize on the unexpected rise of horror films and to capture attention of a Hollywood major (Rhodes 2001: 18-21, 89-114). Because zombies were likely unknown to a majority of Americans, the Halperins attempted to broaden the appeal of *White Zombie* by imbedding into its narrative structure elements of content that had been featured in recent hits. As Rhodes (2001: 13-38) points out, *White Zombie* actually combines aspects of numerous familiar stories including *Faust* (1926) and *Svengali* (1931), all of which promised to appeal to studio gatekeepers. Additionally, as was common practice (Staiger 1997), *White Zombie* was laced with a romantic subplot in an effort to strike a chord with female patrons (see Berenstein 1996: 60-87 on the ubiquity of this tactic). The casting of Bela Lugosi as the lead villain gave the film a degree of star pulling power that was typically lacking in low-budget independent films (see Balio 1993: 143-177). The Halperins and Garnett Weston also tailored *White Zombie* in ways that enabled it to acquire the Production Seal, thereby demonstrating to potential distributors that the film would be able to play lucrative first-run theaters (see Heffernan 2004: 4). When Edward Halperin considered the success of *White Zombie* he attributed it to:

> [A] scientific formula, a chart so to speak. Before we begin a picture we write down a list of questions – questions that might be asked everyone concerned in the film's making and seeing, the distributor, exhibitor, audience, director, etc. When, and only when, our story measures up to every one of the established qualifications, we start laying the foundation of production. In such cases where our contemplated picture misses out on a point, we then go about the task of rectifying it (qtd. in Rhodes 2001: 232-233).

In this sense Halperins and Weston's decision to produce a zombie-based horror film was a cagey one intended to capitalize on increasing faith in horror films, selecting a monster unlikely to be exploited by major studios. Major studios developed horror films by drawing mostly on successful stage plays because they provided deployable blueprints for production and offered built-in audiences (Balio 1993: 298-299, Gomery 1996: 54-55, Hutchings 2004: 11-13). The popularity of horror films' first cycle prompted nearly every studio to try its hand at the genre (Balio 1993: 298, Gomery 1996: 56). With the majors focusing on stage plays and novels, the zombie presented itself as a fresh idea that did not require lengthy or costly copyright negotiations (Russell 2006: 19). For reasons mentioned above, it was unlikely that the majors would not pursue the zombie as part of the emerging horror cycle. The opportunity space – the advantageous alignment of cultural-historical events and organizational procedures – that presented itself to the Halperins coalesced in a fascination with Haitian culture as evidenced by the success of Seabrook's travelogue and a lucrative, nascent, mostly untapped genre with a boogeyman who lacked a transition capacity to be exploited by the organization structures of Hollywood's major studios.

4.4 Engineering Cinematic Zombies

Being experienced filmmakers knowledgeable of prescient industry trends, the Halperins likely realized they could increase their chances of securing a studio distribution deal if they could supply distributors a film with demonstrable box-office potential. In this section I provide further details on four points provided above: 1) *White Zombie* could explicitly appeal to male and female audiences, 2) the Halperins imbued the film with elements from previously successful pictures and popular culture, 3) *White*

Zombie built off of a popular cycle of horror films, and 4) *White Zombie* demonstrated it could conform with censorship standards of the early-1930s.

In the late-1920s and early-1930s Hollywood studios estimated the bulk of their audience consisted of adult women, or that women decided what films their families attended (Balio 1993: 2, Maltby 2003: 19). The studios' conception of their audience deeply impacted the sorts of films they produced and released to the public as nearly every film had to prove culpable of securing a female audience (Balio 1993: 2, Staiger 1997). Horror films from the 1930s and 1940s appealed to women by emphasizing the presence of female characters inserted romantic intrigue into plotlines according to Rhona Berenstein (1996: 60-87). On the latter point, a 1931 article from *Motion Picture Classic* (Hall 1931: 33) entitled "The Feminine Love of Horror" quoted Bela Lugosi who insinuated women were attracted to the sensuousness of horror, "But it is women who love horror. Gloat over it. Feed on it. Are nourished by it. Shudder and cling and cry out – *and come back for more*" (emphasis in the original). *White Zombie* would not only capitalize on Lugosi's sexual presence (discussed below), but also used a prototypical romance plot: Neil Parker (John Harron) must save his recently zombified wife, Madeline (Madge Bellamy), from the voodoo master Murder Legendre (Bela Lugosi). The romance angle can be seen in the aforementioned early ad copy with lines like "[h]ere's a burning glamorous love-tale" and "[s]ee this live, weird, strangest of all love stories!" (*Variety* 1932e). Moreover, lobby cards which depicted a loving embrace between Neil and Madeline demonstrated to exhibitors that they could highlight the romantic aspects of *White Zombie* over its horror aspects. *Motion Picture Herald's* (1932: 36) review of *White Zombie,* for instance, suggested that exhibitors avoid the "'horror' implication" and

"indicate strongly that a girl and a young man, just married become cruelly enmeshed in the web of superstition." According to Janet Staiger (1997: 11) the proliferation of "heterosexual romance" plotlines hedged on their "presumptive appeal to women consumers." Thus, the inclusion of romance in *White Zombie* would have testified to industry gatekeepers that it could appeal to women, thereby maximizing the potential of securing a distribution deal.

At first glance, *White Zombie*'s story appears simple. A young couple, Neil and Madeline, arrive at the estate of Charles Beaumont (Robert Frazer) to be married by Dr. Bruner. Beaumont yearns for the heart of Madeline and enlists the services of the voodoo master, Murder, to win her over. Murder gives Beaumont a zombifying powder to use on Madeline which combined with Murder's burning of a wax effigy causes the eponymous 'white zombie' to appear dead at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony. After being interred in a mausoleum, Beaumont, Murder, and a group of zombies excavate Madeline and bring her body to Murder's castle. Murder then turns on Beaumont, transforming him into a zombie. Tipped off by Dr. Bruner, Neil travels with the doctor to save Madeline from Murder. Neil's reunion with Madeline is soured as Neil cannot awaken her from her zombified state. Dr. Bruner temporarily incapacitates Murder, weakening his control over the zombies. A now half-zombified Beaumont manages to tackle Murder off a cliff, taking both himself and the voodoo master to their certain death. Like lemmings, the zombies follow their master over the cliff, but Madeline is revived to normal, effectively reuniting her with Neil. None of the above scenes derived from *The Magic Island*, instead, they drew from recent Hollywood films.

As already discussed, filmmakers broaden the appeal of their films by employing previously proven material therein. Unlike other early horror films, *White Zombie* could not buffer its risks by adapting a successful stageplay. Moreover, given *The Magic Island*'s sensationalized discussion of Haitian customs and ambiguous description of zombies, the Halperins and Weston had to carefully and selectively draw material from it. As mentioned above much of *White Zombie*'s script borrows liberally from *Faust* and *Svengali*. The crux of *White Zombie*'s plot hinges on the deal struck between Beaumont and Murder which, as Gary Rhodes (2001: 23-26) posits, drew heavily from *Faust* wherein Faust strikes a deal with the devilish Mephistopheles. Both Beaumont and Faust see their ill-begotten bargains turn awry, realizing too late the error of their ways. Where Rhodes emphasizes the Freudian aspects of Faustian allusions in *White Zombie*, I focus on the commercial influence of the plot device. In addition to being a relatively successful film in 1926, the Faustian story arc had a high degree of familiarity with American audiences and prospective buyers. Despite the notoriety of *The Magic Island*, it was likely that Americans did not know what a zombie was (see *Syracuse Herald* 1932: 18). Indeed, *White Zombie*'s pressbook goes to great lengths in explaining zombies and how to promote them to the public (reprinted in Rhodes 2001: 258-262). Most importantly, the Faustian storyline enabled *White Zombie* to adhere to the classic Hollywood narrative by giving it a distinct beginning (Beaumont's jealously causes him to cavort with Murder), middle (Madeline becomes zombified by a slowly repentant Beaumont while Neal tries to rescue his love), and end (Neil gains back Madeline and evil is extinguished); the "quality" most valued by gatekeepers interested in buying outside product (*Film Daily* 1931: 8, Gillette 1931: 13). The appearance of Murder and

the method by which he controls his zombies derives from *Svengali*, released in theaters just one year earlier. In *Svengali,* the eponymous Svengali (John Barrymore) employs hypnotism and telepathy in an attempt to control Trilby (Marian Marsh), the woman he loves. *White Zombie*, Gary Rhodes (2001: 27) notices, "adopts the eyes as a method of control" from *Svengali*. The figures below exhibit the similarities between the characters Svengali and Murder in terms of advertising and in-film characterization as well the female characters Madeline and Trilby. Like the Faustian storyline undergirding *White Zombie*, the visual and character similarities between *White Zombie* and *Svengali* linked *White Zombie* to a successful film which would have enhanced its potential of being picked-up (cf. Bielby and Bielby 1994).

More than anything else, however, *White Zombie* was fashioned to capitalize on the recent successes of horror films like *Dracula, Frankenstein*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Platts forthcoming*b*, Rhodes 2001: 232, Tinée 1932). *Variety* (1932f: 15), for example, called *White Zombie* "the latest addition to the blood curdling cycle," while Mae Tinée (1932: 11) of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* quipped it "belongs to the cycle of horror films." Advertisements, like the one featured in *Variety* (1932e), repeatedly made mention of Bela Lugosi's role in *Dracula*, inviting comparisons between the two films. Rhodes (2001: 21) also points out that *White Zombie* and *Dracula* follow similar blueprints; "those causing disruption...die" and later "plot – its use of travel to a foreign land, its treatment of the hero and heroine, its inclusion of a wise elder … follows from … predecessors like *Dracula*." The interior of Legendre's castle in the film is actually the interior of Dracula's castle (Merritt 2000: 64-66, Rhodes 2001) which was accentuated in publicity stills of the film and likely not lost on the studio representatives who bought the

film. In addition to linking *White Zombie* to other horror films, the presence of Bela Lugosi as already indicated also gave the film great star power. During the studio era of production in particular, Hollywood movie stars were seen as creating a ready-made market for his or her pictures thereby reducing the risks of capital investment (Balio 1993: 143-177). No doubt, securing the caped-aristocratic-neck-puncturer heightened the potential appeal to distributive suitors for *White Zombie*, in part, because Lugosi strongly appealed to female audiences (Hall 1931) and was becoming a figurehead for the genre. No single element of *White Zombie* was enough to sell it, however. Each aspect of its patchwork narrative synergistically mixed to ultimately land the film a distribution deal with United Artists. The use of a romantic subplot accompanied with textual similarities to previously successful popular culture and a budding star of an emerging genre would have allowed a distributor a multitude of marketing opportunities as the film opened in theaters. Given the localized nature of film advertising and ballyhoo (Rhodes 2001: 117) and studio desire for films with salable elements to multiple taste publics, *White Zombie*'s multi-textual properties gave zombies the transition capacity they needed to reach the silver screen.

All the effort of constructing a coherent horror narrative around zombies would have been for naught if *White Zombie* did not meet the censorship standards of its era. Throughout the entirety of the studio era (c. 1930-1948), censorship fell into hands of the Production Code Administration (PCA) which made sure the content of films "would not snag on the sensibilities of anyone, particularly anyone of influence" (Maltby 1993: 37). As a substitute for creating age-specific or otherwise differentiated content, the PCA ensured all films were fit for all audiences. While the period between 1930 and 1933 is

often perceived as an era of lax enforcement, Richard Maltby (1993: 39-40) argues the transition between the epochal phases to be gradual with film content differing, but not drastically. Though top-rank (Tzioumakis 2006: 29-30) and low-end independent (Scheafer 1999) producers would challenge the precepts of the Code, the Halperins – seeking a distribution deal with a major studio – were not in the position to make a bold (artistic) stand. Without a Production Code seal, *White Zombie* could not play in lucrative first-run theaters and would have squelched studio interest in acquiring it (Heffernan 2004: 4, Schaefer 1999: 156-157). Given *White Zombie*'s relatively high budget for an independent production ($50,000-$62,500), denial of a Production Code seal would have certainly caused everyone involved in its production to lose money (Jacobs 1934). With horror constantly subject to PCA criticism (Maltby 1993:50, McManus 1936: X3, Naylor 2011, *Variety* 1936b) and using a potentially controversial originary source, the Halperins and Weston had to be very careful to avoid the most controversial material from *The Magic Island* lest they squander the best opportunity of their careers to make "big money." Vis-à-vis comparisons with contemporaneous horror films reveal *White Zombie* to be relatively conservative as noted by reviewer Mae Tinée (1932). The most fantastical elements from *The Magic Island* are drastically scaled down or completely excised; *White Zombie* also contains no blood, no animal sacrifice, and no nudity which all appear in *The Magic Island. White Zombie* was not without its potentially controversial moments, however: the vivisepulture of Madeline, the numerous sexual undertones of the text, the death of a zombie in the sugar mill, and the possibility that Beaumont in a semi-autonomous state-of-mind committed suicide at the conclusion of the film, all of which

could have hurt its chances of being widely distributed as each could have aroused ratings controversies.

Indicative of *White Zombie'*s careful construction, when the Halperins completed postproduction they immediately sought a distribution deal with two of the majors: Universal and Columbia (Rhodes 2001: 111-114, *Variety* 1932b, *Variety* 1932c). However, both deemed the film too risky an investment (Rhodes 2011: 111-114). During *White Zombie*'s production, the lackluster performance of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), the fourth film in the horror cycle, may have shied the studios away from investing in another fright flick. Film companies were struggling through the pangs of the Great Depression, many of them declaring bankruptcy and going into receivership around the time, preventing them from taking a risk on a potentially vanishing cycle. Eventually a deal was signed with United Artists as part of the studios' move to buy-up outside films (*Variety* 1932d). The contract saw the Halperins surrender to Amusement Securities Corporation distribution rights of *White Zombie*, and saw them waive their right to use the term "zombie" in the title of a film for a period of ten years. The deal also guaranteed that the film was an original property that did not infringe upon the rights of other filmmakers (a point to which I will return below).

4.5 Release, Reception, and Studio Response (Transition Capacity)

After securing a distribution deal, *White Zombie* was released in July of 1932 to mixed reviews and success (Rhodes 2001). Particularly critical of the film was the *New York Times* (1932a: 18) which noted "[t]here was, in short, no great reason. Nor was there, to be candid, much reason for *White Zombie*." Robert Lusk (1932: B15) from the *Los Angeles Times* criticized *White Zombie*'s production values, "[h]asty preparation and

quick direction are evident throughout." *Variety* (1932f: 15) saw it differently, "Victor Halperin goes to Hayti [sic], hotbed of the obi, for the latest addition to the blood curdling cycle, and with good results." A box-office success for a low-budget independent film, *White Zombie* performed inconsistently throughout the United States (Rhodes 2001: 115, 269-272). In some cities like Los Angeles *White Zombie* performed comparable to *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* (Lusk 1932), but in most areas it garnered approximately half the ticket sales as previous horror films (Rhodes 2001: 269-272). In the summer and fall of 1932, some industry observers began to doubt the long-term viability of horror (Naylor 2011, Rhodes 2001: 98). *White Zombie*'s lukewarm sales in Chicago were taken by *Variety* (1932g: 9) as a sign that "the horror cycle is over and more bookings of that kind only invites deficits." With the horror seen as running its course, perhaps interest in Haiti and voodoo could still be turned into cash. Mere weeks after *White Zombie*'s release the *New York Times* (1932b: X3) reported, "[n]ow that *White Zombie* has broken the ice, another picture concerned with voodoo is promised, this time by Columbia." The resulting film *Black Moon* (1934), a voodoo-based crime drama, was released in 1934 and did poorly at the box office (Matthews 2009: 3). The conclusion of the United States' military occupation of Haiti in 1934 made it easy to chalk up *White Zombie*'s surprise success to a faddish interest in Haitian lore. Hollywood's major studios made no serious attempt to make voodoo, Haiti, or zombies a centerpiece on the screen in the ensuing years (Senn 1998).

Studio adjustments to horror films did not favor the further production of zombie-centered films. Horror films were numerically the smallest genre produced by the studios (Balio 1993: 298-310) and because major studios thrived on consistency and efficiency,

they preferred mad scientist horror films which could be easily made and posted consistent sales and films with built-in audiences (Balio 1993: 298, Tudor 1989: 27-33; chapter 5). Also, related to the aesthetic conventions of the classical narrative style which demanded that antagonists had to be destroyed, studios initially chose product differentiation over direct sequels (Hutchings 2004: 17-18, Neale 2000: 95). This made bringing back successful boogeymen for future films exceptionally difficult – even if studios strongly desired it. *Frankenstein*'s sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), was released four years later and *Dracula*'s sequel, *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), five years later. With *White Zombie* being the only film to gainfully exploit popularity in zombies or Haiti, studios' orientation to horror, and absence of direct sequels investor and producer interest in new zombie films, for the time being, seemed remote.

4.6 *Revolt of the Zombies* and Legal and Production Code Administration Setbacks

It took the Halperins four years to revisit zombies. On part of *White Zombie*'s success the Halperins began a brief and unsuccessful collaboration with Paramount which ended with the commercial disappointment of *Supernatural* (1933) a murder-mystery film, and the Halperins returning to independent production (Rhodes 2001: 161, 233). The failure of their subsequent films (*Variety* 1934a, *Variety* 1934b), the continued popularity of radio shows featuring zombies (see Hand 2011, Vials 2011), the success of *Bride of Frankenstein*, and the announcement that a sequel to *Dracula* was in the pipeline (*Variety* 1935), led the Halperins to conclude that a return to zombie film production was commercially viable (Rhodes 2001, 171-177). Industry conditions began improving with renewed demand for independent productions (*New York Times* 1935, Scheuer 1936) and the fact that nearly every horror film released in 1935 managing to do well despite earlier

concerns over the genre's long-term durability (Naylor 2011) gave the Halperins another opportunity space to produce another zombie film. Between January and April 1936, the duo supervised scripting, casting, shooting, and postproduction of *Revolt of the Zombies* in full knowledge that it would provoke a legal battle (Rhodes 2001: 171-172). That May, Judge Herman Hoffman ruled in a case entitled *Amusement Securities Corporation v. Academy Pictures Distribution Corporation* that *Revolt of the Zombies* could not be promoted as a sequel to *White Zombie*, and also granted Amusement Securities Corporation the exclusive right to use the term "zombie" in movie titles for the remainder of the 1930s, a right they never exercised (ibid.: 174).

A far cry from its predecessor, in terms of story, *Revolt of the Zombies* begins in the midst of World War I with a cadre of zombified Cambodian soldiers marching, impervious to oncoming bullets. An expedition of white Europeans then visits the lost city of Angkor to discover the secret of the zombies. In the midst of the expedition, Claire (Dorothy Stone) decides to break off her engagement with Armand (Dean Jagger) to be with Cliff (Robert Nolan) – all members of the same expedition. Smitten with grief, Armand manages to unlock the riddle of the zombie only to abuse his new found power by zombifying everyone in order to win back Claire. To prove his love to Claire, Armand relinquishes his power over his zombie minions upon which they revolt against him. Despite obvious differences with *White Zombie*, Judge Herman Hoffman ruled: "[i]t seems that the term 'zombie,' though the term be considered descriptive, is subject to exclusive appropriation as a trade name. A word which is not in common use and is unintelligible and nondescriptive to the general public, though it may be known to linguists and scientists, may be properly regarded as arbitrary and fanciful and capable of

being used as a trademark or trade name." He continued: "[t]he word 'zombie' has acquired a secondary meaning, suggestive of the photoplay *White Zombie*, by association of that term with the title *White Zombie*, in the minds of the public as a result of the widespread and successful showing of *White Zombie*, and the publicity given thereto, which entitles the owner of that photoplay to injunctive relief against the manufacture, exhibition, etc. of the photoplay *Revolt of the Zombies*" (qtd. in Rhodes 2001: 173). The troubles encountered by *Revolt of the Zombies* and its commercial failure mitigated subsequent production of zombie films. The situation was compounded by pressure from the PCA who strongly disincentivized the production horror films from 1937 to 1938 by repeatedly advising against their production and erroneously suggesting a British ban of such films (see Naylor 2011). Nearly everything *White Zombie* had going for it, *Revolt of the Zombies* had going against it. *Revolt of the Zombies* lacked star power, the narrative had no demonstrably marketable elements (except for the zombies themselves and its romance subplot), it did not have the promotional juggernaut of a major studio behind it, studios were no longer interested in acquiring independently produced films, the film was released just prior to the horror film's two year hiatus, with exception of Universal most studios chose not to pursue horror films (and Universal had preferences for certain monsters), and, of course, the legal problems it experienced. It was too much for a low-budget zombie film to overcome; in short, the opportunity space to make zombie films closed and the genre's transitional capacity to the majors was lacking.

4.7 The Zombies' Early Endogenous Genre Ecology

Even though interest in zombies faded quickly after reaching the silver screen, the creatures' unique ecological qualities would not allow them to remain buried for long.

Born out of xenophobic cultural misappropriations and lacking an anchoring literary tradition, the early zombie displayed an amazing narrative elasticity not afforded to other monsters of the time (Dendle 2001, Russell 2006). Even early in its development zombies lacked a consistent definition. In 1932, mere years after *The Magic Island*, and even before *White Zombie*, *New York Times* journalist Brooks J. Atkinson (1932: 17) asked "[i]f zombies are those who work without knowing why and who see without understanding, one begins to look around among one's fellow-countrymen with a new apprehension?" Likewise, in a *New York Times* (McManus 1936: X3) interview concerning *Revolt of the Zombies*, Edward Halperin suggested that zombies do not just come from Haiti, but seemingly have nationalistic tendencies: "[d]own in Haiti voodooism raises the zombies from their graves and sets them to work on the farms. In Asiatic Cambodia the zombies are employed as fighting creatures, and indomitable soldiers they make." In addition to film, zombies were found in other popular cultural contexts (see especially Hand 2011, Pulliam 2007, Vials 2011). Analyzing the use of zombies in 1930s and 1940s radio Richard Hand (2011: 43, 47) observes "[w]hen it comes to the live radio zombie, in some cases the radio medium dictated that the living dead had a surprising degree of consciousness, with zombies able to think and talk." Inconsistencies not only existed between texts, but within them as well. *White Zombie*, for example, seems to have three classes of zombies, the native Haitians castigated to work in Legendre's sugar mill, Legendre's ex-associates now serving as his minions, and Madeline the "white zombie" with each zombie group moving and acting differently to a set of seemingly different rules.

By the time of *Revolt of the Zombies'* release, zombies were no longer seen as creatures from Haiti, but storyline ideas that could be transplantable into virtually any situation. According to *Motion Picture Herald*'s (1936: 68) review of *Revolt of the Zombies:* "[t]he zombie idea, long popular in fiction circles, is treated of melodramatically in a setting conducive to story purposes, a remote and oriental region into which a party of whites are sent in search of the secret of zombie creation and control." While plunking down an iron-clad definition of "zombie" from *White Zombie* and *Revolt of the Zombies* errs on the side of quixotic, we can note that the differences – stark as they are – observed some boundaries. In both films – and in other fictions – early zombies lack autonomous volition. Whether or not they can talk, they are all under the control of someone. Likewise, the former sense of self has been temporarily or permanently disjointed. Zombies may demonstrate flickers of their former selves, but ultimately such connections are fleeting; zombies lack purposive and meaningful remembrances of their past. And for the most part zombies were largely conscribed to Othered places (e.g. Haiti and Cambodia). This early ecology potentially could have provided fertile ground for imaginative innovations of the monster. However, as discussed in the following chapter, the material auspices of production selected different blueprints to exploit. Be that as it may, the lack of clearly defined ecological boundaries made the zombie subject to tremendous interpretive and narrative alterations as the next chapter more clearly elucidates. Eventually this ecology would prove pivotal in getting the zombie discursively recognized in a variety of texts through the 1930s and 1940s, which, in turn, were vital to identifying 1950s zombies and eventually recognizing George Romero's ghoul film as a zombie film and, of course, the zombies we see today.

4.8 Conclusion

In sum, the temporal spark responsible for interest in zombies originated in Eurocentric curiosity of Haiti, the only sovereign nation to win independence through a successful slave revolt. *The Magic Island* – the most popular text to emerge from US American fascination with Haiti – did not supply a workable formula to exploit, but its popularity served as an extra-industrial event that suggested commercial possibilities in Haiti, voodoo, and zombies existed. A team of experienced and savvy cultural entrepreneurs – taking advantage of opportunity spaces within the filmmaking industries – constructed a cinematic text around zombies by imbuing the text with a narrative structure that borrowed heavily from other popular texts. This multi-textual recombination, I argued, was intentionally constructed to coo major studios for a distribution contract. Without question, *White Zombie* exemplified the xenophobic fervor of many US Americans by portraying Haiti as thoroughly backwards and thoroughly Other (see especially Bishop 2008), but the collision of temporal circumstance (fascination with Haiti) and material practice (the act of producing the film) fused to produce a filmic text much different than its inspirational source (*The Magic Island)*. Given *The Magic Island*'s sensational aspects, *White Zombie* had to be different from it as a matter of practically. As a case in point, filmed in September and August 1933 (Senn 1998: 41-42), *Love Wanga* (1934) (see figure 13) played-up the sexualized aspects of America's folklorization of Haitian culture and paid dearly. Unable to find release in the United States until the forties, *Variety* (1942: 45) noted "Theme, that of a light-complexioned colored West Indian girl's desperate love for a white man, might have

been made into something, through doubtful it would have received the Hays office seal, which this holds."

Despite *White Zombie*'s success as an independent production, a zombie follow-up was not pursued because horror was thought to be a dying cycle and the studio's preferred to mine Eurocentric source material; that is, the zombie as it was understood did not transition into the studios' material auspices of production. When another opportunity space presented itself, the Halperins – the brothers behind *White Zombie* – jumped at it. As result of a contract they signed years earlier, their new zombie flick became the subject of a court battle that likely deterred further investment in the creature. The press surrounding the legal troubles of *Revolt of the Zombies* coupled with its mediocre box-office receipts blunted the production of similar zombie films. Between the three zombie films and other popular texts there exist massive discrepancies. This gave the zombie a wide ecology, potentially allowing it to be seen in a tremendous variety of creatures. As the zombie entered into its next phase of development, the voodoo-themed zombie would find itself on one of the lowliest rungs of the cinematic ladder, Poverty Row; the domain of notoriously low-budget, quickly-made, cheap films with unknown talents (Weaver 1993). In contrast, the ecological plasticity of the creature would allow it to be seen in several mad scientist films. The next chapter examines these forks in zombie cinema's development.

Chapter 5 : "It May Be Too Many Cooks Spoiled the Broth Scripturally": Hollywood Hybridity and Poverty Row Purity

5.1 Introduction: "Two Pages in the Book of Movie Horrors Got Stuck Together"

Zombies may be allegorically malleable, but credulity with them only goes so far. *The Hollywood Reporter*'s (1946: 3) review of *Valley of the Zombies*, for example, skeptically noted of character Ormond Murks' (Ian Keith) apparent lack of zombieness "the film-going public is now offered a return-from-the-dead character who calls himself a zombie, yet goes around on blood-sucking expeditions like a vampire." In making sense of the apparent monstrous mix-up, the anonymous reviewer humorously suggested "perhaps two pages in the book of movie horrors got stuck together." The incredulity of the *Hollywood Reporter* review, however, belies the readiness of other critics to see zombies in pictures like *The Walking Dead* (1936) and *The Return of Dr. X* (1939), two films that never make mention of zombies in script or advertising. The review of *Valley of the Zombies* also obscures the fact that many zombie films produced throughout the 1930s and 1940s took liberties with zombies and routinely combined them wither other generic staples (e.g. comedies, crime-thillers, and mad science films) and altered their temporalized ecology in the process.

In understanding the appearance of "mixed-up" zombies – to steal from Ray Dennis Steckler's *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies* (1964) – I chiefly assess the ten zombie films produced under the auspicial milieus of Hollywood's major studios and Poverty Row's production lots in this chapter (see tables 5.1 and 5.2). My analytic scope – covering the years 1936 to 1946 –

entails the production of zombie films through the studio era (c. 1930-1948).[6] In addition to the ten films that inform the bulk of my analysis, I also briefly comment on the only two zombie films – *Scared Stiff* (1953) and *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1953) – produced in the period immediately following the studio era (1949-1954). In contrast to the bulk of existing literature which focuses on the very blatant and latent racisms found in voodoo-laced zombie pictures, I place non-voodoo elements of these films squarely at the center of the debate to unveil the constitutive influence of industrial practices and discursive recognition patterns on the generic development of cultural objects. The epistemological maneuver of analytically downplaying racial hyperbole (not denying it), I conjecture, fosters an enhanced understanding of zombies' generic evolution and contextualizes the changes that are examined in later chapters.

With their discursive plasticity, it would seem that zombies were poised to grapple with the fears of the Great Depression and interwar period. Having demonstrating themselves transplantable and narratively flexible in a variety of platforms (see Hand 2011, Pulliam 2007: 727-729, Vials 2011), zombies' early endogenous genre ecology seemingly offered limited possibilities for potential cultural creators. With the filmmaking industries still experimenting with the limits and gestalt of horror films (Balio 1993: 298-312, Gomery 1996: 55-57), zombies, as shells of former humans, stood primed to capture the mentalité of the Great Depression as briefly suggested last chapter. Moreover, zombies with their stoic, unfeeling embodiments were also well-positioned to

[6] Considerable debate exists over the exact years of the studio system. Some industry histories push the date of initiation date back to the 1920s while some extend its reach into the 1960s. My timeframe roughly corresponds with the adoption of unit production by the major studios and concludes with the Supreme Court's decision concerning the Paramount antitrust on 3 May 1948. My time frame also corresponds to what Douglas Gomery (1996: 55) calls the period the 'Golden Age of the Hollywood studio.' That said, the decree did not put an immediate end to Hollywood's production, distribution, and exhibition practices as Michael Conant's (1960) excellent monograph documents, but drastic changes were almost immediate (Doherty 2002, Heffernan 2004, Schatz 1997, Tzioumakis 2006).

grapple with the terrors and inhumanities of war, but David J. Skal (2001: 211-227) notes films such as *The Wolf-Man* (1940) and *Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942) gave Americans their cathartic wartime releases. That is, although the temporal auspices for zombies were aligned, the material auspices of production during the 1930s and 1940s combined with a series of extra- and intra-events jaundiced the numeric development of zombie films, but as we shall see did not necessarily inhibit its scriptural ontogeny.

Table 5.1: Studio Produced Zombie Films

Film	Year	Producer	Distributor
The Walking Dead	1936	Warner Bros.	Warner Bros.
The Return of Dr. X	1939	Warner Bros.	Warner Bros.
The Ghost Breakers	1940	Paramount	Paramount
I Walked with a Zombie	1943	RKO	RKO
Zombies on Broadway	1945	RKO	RKO

Table 5.2: Poverty Row Produced Zombie Films

Film	Year	Producer	Distributor
King of the Zombies	1941	Monogram	Monogram
Revenge of the Zombies	1943	Monogram	Monogram
Voodoo Man	1944	Monogram	Monogram
The Face of Marble	1946	Monogram	Monogram
Valley of the Zombies	1946	Republic	Republic

Therefore through this chapter, I specifically aim to demonstrate how the differing industrial milieus of the major studios and Poverty Row production companies factored into the production of two variations of zombie films: the zombie-centered films associated with Poverty Row and the "zombie films" of the major studios (cf. Platts forthcoming*b*). I use quotation marks to describe the studios' zombie films to indicate that the zombies in their films were auxiliary characters or that they were pictures labeled as containing zombies by reviewers. I argue the "zombie films" of the major studios resulted from reflexive processes of product homogenization related to studio

organizational structures, and that discursive inconsistencies often seen in genre labeling as well as zombies' endogenous genre ecology led to some films being understood as having zombies in them. In contrast, I locate the production of zombie-centered films in Poverty Row's budgetary constraints, their niche-oriented production strategies, and the territoriality of their selling and distribution practices which allowed them to produce more genre-specific films catered to audience segments. For clarity, I organize the remainder of the chapter accordingly: 1) I examine the material auspices of the majors studios and a series of industrial events as they factored into the production of "zombie films," 2) I detail the auspices and logic of Poverty Row studios, spotlighting the industrial events responsible for their continued (mis)use and retrofitting of voodoo in their zombie films, 3) I take stock of zombie cinema's endogenous genre ecology as altered by the studio era and generic recognition/attribution patterns; 4) I discuss the Paramount antitrust decree of 1948 and the two zombie films produced immediately after (the impact of the decree is also discussed in chapter 6, and 5) I consider possibilities for zombie cinema as visions of mushroom clouds and communist infiltrations seeped into the collective conscious.

5.2 Boris Karloff "Must be Getting Pretty Tired of Having to be the Guinea Pig for All These Outlandish Experiments": The Studios' "Zombie Films"

The popularity of horror during the studio era is overstated. Considered by many the Golden Age of horror cinema, the studio era sired some of the most recognizable horror icons of all time (e.g. Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, the Mummy, and the Wolf-man), but modern sentimentalism for Universal's famous monsters elides the industry's acrimonious orientation toward the genre. Consistently greeted with suspicion and

derision, *Variety* (1936b: 7) noted of horror's sudden hiatus in the mid-1930s: "[r]eason attributed by [Universal] for abandonment of horror cycle is that European countries, especially England, are prejudiced against this type of product. Despite heavy local consumption of its chillers, [Universal] is taking heed to warning from abroad." And later, "studio's London rep has cautioned production exec to scrutinized carefully all so-called chiller productions, to avoid any possible control with British censorship." Assessing archival sources, Alex Naylor (2011) argues that actual evidence of a British ban on horror films was shortcoming, but the Production Code Administration effectively stultified the genre by constantly pestering the studios and fabricating international animosity toward horror films. Though surprising spikes in box-office receipts occasionally fueled short-lived cycles (e.g. Cunningham 1943; *Variety* 1938, 1944b), horror remained the least numerically cultivated trend in studio filmmaking (Balio 1993: 298-299). Smaller studios like Columbia, RKO, and especially Universal specialized in the genre. Horror films, in general – zombie film in particular – never became a priority, in part, because they were never enormously successful (Gomery 1996).

In 1936 and 1937 prevailing industry wisdom saw horror as a dying (or dead) genre until Universal resuscitated the genre on a double bill of *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931) (*Variety* 1938). This extra-industrial event would prove pivotal in the development of horror cinema as the rejuvenation of the genre came from familiar monsters with big studio backing, not Caribbean upstart zombies or even experimental films from independent filmmakers. The opportunity spaces that allowed for the production of *White Zombie* (1932) were gone, the studios thoroughly controlled production. Universal immediately responded to the perceived re-interest in horror by

releasing *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) on 13 January 1939, followed by cachet of now familiar sequels. Other studios responded with Warner Bros. producing *The Return of Dr. X* (1939), Paramount releasing *The Cat and the Canary* (1939), Twentieth Century-Fox turning to *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1939), and RKO remaking *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939). During reinvigoration of the horror genre, *White Zombie* was reissued where it performed "normal" at the same time that *Son of Frankenstein* took in the "biggest take in weeks" across the United States (*Variety* 1939a: 9). *White Zombie*'s lukewarm performance during the red-hot successes of Gothic horror films likely tempered direct studio interest in zombies during the second cycle of horror films. Indeed, the studios played it safe with horror films by favoring the production of sequels, familiar remakes, or hybridized horror films rather than trying their luck in untested or newer fare. When the genre got hot after its two-year hiatus, studios were unsure how to cater to the renewed interest (Jungmeyer 1939: 9). Universal, for instance, relied on a stockpile of predictable, audience-tested, European-inflected monsters. According to a *Variety* (1944b: 3) article: "Brood of screen monsters with the [Universal] copyright brand – 'Frankenstein Monster,' 'Dracula,' 'The Wolf Man,' 'The Invisible Man,' 'The Mummy' and their eerie satellites and ghoulish comrades, having been paying off at the rate of around $750,000 net annually, with years showing considerable excess over that." Tim Snelson (2009) and Mark Jancovich (2010) among others posit that, in addition to Universal's monster grist mill, horror went upscale during the 1940s as studios began abandoning B-films in the early part of the decade (more on this later). Failed attempts at finding a Midas formula for horror films influenced larger studios to abandon the genre almost outright during the period (Balio 1993: 298-312, Gomery 1996: 50-51).

Collectively the studios' material orientation to filmmaking did not include zombies; simply put, zombies' transition capacity did not make them undead darlings.

Despite zombies' lack of transition capacity to the studios' production lots, the majors managed to helm five "zombie films" from the years 1936 to 1946: *The Walking Dead, The Return of Dr. X, The Ghost Breakers* (1940), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), and *Zombies on Broadway* (1945). Within the zombie quintet there are two comedies (*The Ghost Breakers* and *Zombies on Broadway*), two mad science films (*The Walking Dead* and *The Return of Dr. X*) and one zombie centered film (*I Walked with a Zombie*). The randomness of the studios' zombie films offers prima evidence that the majors took liberties with zombies and were therefore innovative with the monsters, but deeper investigation suggests otherwise. Rather than being innovative, I argue the studios' courting of zombies occurred reflexively, not from an intentional tinkering with the zombies' generic ecology. In explicating my argument I build on two observations regarding studio (non)treatment of zombies: 1) the studios do not specifically appeal to the monster in either title or advertising (at least as much as Poverty Row), 2) conscious employment of zombies relegates them to the background of the narrative. It could easily be argued that the pictures were not zombie films, but films said or thought to have zombies in them. Both observations fold into the organizational structures of studio production during the 1930s and 1940s. In other words, the illusory accomplishment of innovation in studio "zombie films" emerged through routinized institutional practices.

In regards to specific appeals to the zombie, only *I Walked with a Zombie* and *Zombies on Broadway* evoke zombie in their titles. *The Ghost Breakers* is the sole additional mentions zombie in its narrative. In both *The Walking Dead* and *The Return of*

Dr. X reviewers saw zombies in them, producers did not intentionally employ zombies. *New York Times* critic Frank S. Nugent (1936: 13), for instance, remarked of Boris Karloff in his role as John Elman, "[t]here is no denying that he makes an impressive zombie." Similarly, *Variety*'s (1939b: 3) review of *The Return of Dr. X* explained the film's storyline thusly: "[p]lot swings on the bringing to life of Dr. X, after electrocution, by a blood specialist, and the subsequent ceaseless search for blood by the *zombie* to sustain his second life" (emphasis added). With the exception of *I Walked with a Zombie*, no film exploits zombies as its primary selling point; the creatures merely garnish other aspects of each film. *Zombies on Broadway*, for example, downplays its "zombie angle" in advertising, highlighting, instead, the sexual-comedy aspects of its storyline. *Variety*'s (1945b: 27) review made a similar observation, "*Zombies on Broadway* turns out to be a ghost comedy, with half of it punched hard for laughs, some of which fail to materialize." Likewise, ballyhoo for *The Ghost Breakers* hyped its romantic comedy and haunted house elements over the presence of Noble Johnson as a zombie. Meanwhile advertising for *The Walking Dead* strongly likened it to *Frankenstein*, while *The Return of Dr. X* strongly borrows from *Frankenstein*'s mad scientist formula with *Variety* (1939c: 14) proclaiming it "a chip off the Frankenstein block." Understanding the intersection of an extra-industrial event – the rise of double billing – and an intra-industrial event – B-unit film production – helps clarify the appearance of these "zombie films" in the studios' filmographies.

Throughout the studio era, the major studios protected their oligopoly through the imposition of numerous trade practices that placed tremendous market pressures and risks on independent exhibitors. Chief among these practices was block-booking, a strategy

which saw the forced selling of numerous films under a single price tag (sometimes an entire season's worth of films). Block-booking operated as an all-or-nothing proposition, in order to acquire highly desired films, exhibitors had to agree to attain lesser desired films. Tino Balio (1993: 20) argues the benefits of block-booking for the studios: "[k]nowing that even the poorest picture would find an outlet, the studios could operate at full capacity." Block-booking also stunted competition by cordoning off the market to independent filmmakers and distributors. The majors also engaged in clearance and zoning, a practice whereby the studios determined which films were shown which theaters at which time. Accordingly, highly sought after films would play in studio owned first-run theaters until their lucrativeness dried-up before playing in second-, third-, and fourth-run theaters. Studios also determined the minimum price of movie tickets through admission price discrimination.

In dealing with studio distributive practices independent exhibitors began playing films in double bills which was initially fought by the majors (Schallert 1934), but quickly became an exhibition norm (Nugent 1943) and dramatically increased demand for completed pictures, particularly low-budget films in the process (*Variety* 1934a). Product turnover in smaller subsequent-run theaters was especially high with exhibitors often needing three-hundred inexpensive pictures per year to fill the bottom halves of double bills (Balio 1993: 8). The demand created by the rise of double billing catalyzed in production of B-films – films designed to play on the bottom half of a double bill – and the erection of B-units – filmmaking staffs tasked with producing B-films. B-films diverged from A-films in a number of important ways. Brian Taves (1993: 314) shows that in contrast to A-class productions, B-films typically lacked star power, were shot on

limited budgets with tight shooting schedules, and typically ran between fifty and seventy-five minutes. Industry-observer Bosley Crowther (1938: 126) noted that because B-films sold at flat rates, as opposed to rental agreements, their profits were dependable and reliable, affording the major studios the opportunity to experiment with A-films which could be more lucrative (but could be more costly if they failed). The reliability, dependability, and limits of profitability for B-films also gave studios little incentive to innovative low-budget output.

At the same time double billing spread, studios were shifting their organization structure in terms of production. Shortly after the adoption of sound, studios began switching from a central producer system to a producer unit system in order "to shave cost [and] improve quality" (*Motion Picture Herald* 1931a: 9). Weaknesses such as the stultification of ideas and the logistics of simultaneous monitoring of production costs for hundreds of films caused the central producer system to be modified into the producer-unit system (Balio 1993: 75; Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985: 323). The change to the producer-unit system transferred power from one executive to a group of producers, each charged with overseeing a "unit" of studio-contracted employees and the completion of three to six films per production season (Balio 1993: 77-78; Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985: 320-329; Tzioumakis 2006: 38). The producer-unit system broke the practice of filmmaking into a greater number of parts, creating a host of functionaries with specialized takes including story development, pre- and post-production, and market research (cf. Durkheim 1984: 68-87). The functionaries of B-units faced more acute pressures than their A-class counterparts. B-units operated under extreme time and monetary demands making hybridization a necessity (Crowther 1938: 126). To save time

and money, many B-units operated with brutal efficiency often recycling previously purchased source material or slightly altering films that had done fair or even poor at the box-office (Balio 1993: 2, Schatz 1997: 172). The producer-unit system, according to its advocates, helped control budgets, improve film quality, and enhance product differentiation as each unit oversaw the production of specific types of films (Balio 1993: 75-76, Tzioumakis 2006: 38), but as we shall see it also homogenized production greatly.

With few exceptions, horror films were absorbed into B-units because of their relatively low production costs and their steady but unspectacular grosses. If not a sequel, many new studio horrors originated from ready-made stories that could easily meld into productive protocols (Gomery 1996, Staiger 1997). With emphasis on efficiency, the studios' B-units increasingly relied on series pictures – or films with recurring characters, settings and plots whose market was firmly established (Schatz 1997: 64). Even though completed B-films had a guaranteed market because of studio control over exhibition, the majors never treated B-film carelessly because studio reputations often hinged on the quality of their B and A-films (Taves 1993: 318, Tzioumakis 2006: 74). Because of this, studios never embraced B-films and often saw them as potentially alienating to audiences (Churchill 1937, *Motion Picture Herald* 1937). Concern over B-film quality influenced major studios to spend between $50,000 and $200,000 per film (sometimes more), a sum significantly higher than Poverty Row studios which frequently produced films for under $30,000 (Balio 1993: 102, Weaver 1993). The major studios' orientation to B-film production limited the type of (horror) films they could and would produce and zombies with their inconsistent track record did not neatly transition into studio mandates.

A closer inspection of the studios' "zombie films" reveals that they were part of different production trends, not an intentional and conscientious cultivation of zombies. A majority of studio horror films were mad scientist films (Tudor 1989: 27-33) which could be cheaply and efficiently altered to meet intense schedule demands. *The Walking Dead* was part of a cycle of mad scientist films starring Boris Karloff that included *The Man They Could Not Hang* (1939), *Before I Hang* (1940), and *The Man with Nine Lives* (1940), all were offshoots of *Frankenstein* and only *The Walking Dead* was said to contain a zombie. *The Return of Dr. X* is also a mad scientist film, a sequel-in-name-only to *Dr. X* (1932), and was Warner Bros.' response to the popularity of Universal's double bill reissue of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* (Scott 1939). *The Ghost Breakers* was a follow-up to *The Cat and the Canary* (1939) both starring Bob Hope and Paulette Goddard. Where the former built on the success of the latter, the latter was produced as Paramount's response to Universal's rekindling of horror films (*Los Angeles Times* 1939b). *I Walked with a Zombie* emanated from Lewton-unit at RKO which was tasked with making horror films similar to Universal (Bansak 2003). *Zombies on Broadway* was an early-entrant in buddy-duo horror-comedies that was presaged by *The Cat and the Canary*, *The Devil Bat* (1940), and *Spooks Run Wild* (1941), but made famous by Bud Abbott and Lou Costello (Miller 2000).

Todd Gitlin's (2000) observations pertaining to network television programming apply to the studios' production of "zombie films," "[c]onsumers want novelty…manufacturers…want to deploy their repertory of the tried-and-true in such a way as to generate novelty without risk. The fusion of these pressures is what producers the recombinant style, which collects the old in new packages and hopes for a magical

synthesis." Zombies were added to studios' previously successful formulas in the hopes of re-striking gold, not in zombies but in the formulas to which zombies were added (e.g. the comedic and romantic chemistry of Bob Hope and Paulette Goddard). In this sense, the studios' "zombie films" stemmed from functionaries toiling within stifling organizational settings, centripetally repurposing snippets of prior pop culture ephemera to complete the necessary tasks encumbered in unit production. The illusion of innovation, transplanting the zombie into yet-familiar territory, derived from a patchwork of non-innovative elements merged together in a fashion that makes them appear innovative, but actually made them resemble other production trends with enough differences to make them look distinct. The hybridized patchwork of the films was therefore reflexive, resulting from attempts by unit producers and directors to differentiate single films from similar films being produced at the time. Their use of zombies, conscious or otherwise, was incidental; zombies are not really the crux of the films. When compared to Poverty Row's zombie films the studio "zombie films" appear innovative, but when studio "zombie films" are compared to other production trends the appearance of innovation dissolves. The studios' "zombie films" similarities to other production trends were duly noted by the trade press. Frank Nugent's (1936: 13) review of *The Walking Dead* joked that Boris Karloff "must be getting pretty tired of having to be the guinea pig for all these outlandish experiments." *Variety* (1936a: 26) noted the tiredness of *The Walking Dead*'s plot devices "[s]cientific and philosophic formulas which stud and motivate the narrative have been churned over by both screen and stage." *Motion Picture Herald* (1939: 8) reported *The Return of Dr. X* "is a cutback to such eerie productions as *Frankenstein*, *Dr. X*, and *Svengali*." The *Hollywood Reporter* (1940: 3)

began its review of *The Ghost Breakers* proclaiming: "'Encore' was the cry following the tremendous success of teaming Bob Hope and Paulette Goddard in *The Cat and the Canary*. Producer Arthur Hornblow, Jr. has answered that demand with *The Ghost Breakers, a thriller comedy with the same costars in a very similar eerie predicament*" (emphasis added). *Film Daily* (1940: 14) meanwhile announced "[f]ollowing the formula of the previous Hope-Goddard starrer, *The Cat and the Canary, The Ghost Breakers*, if anything, tops the former production. *Variety* (1940: 14) similarly mentioned that *The Ghost Breakers* refined the Hope-Goddard formula. According to *Film Daily*'s (1945: 7) review of *Zombies on Broadway*, "[c]omedy is the ingredient of *Zombies on Broadway*, with dashes of mystery and horror stuff to set off the laugh-getting situations in which the clowning abilities of Wally Brown and Alan Carney unleashed with moderate effect."

It may be beneficial to shift focus to the studios' only zombie-centered film, *I Walked with a Zombie* to understand why studios never placed much confidence in the Caribbean boogeyman. Understanding *I Walked with a Zombie* requires understanding Val Lewton and his production style. Lewton was hired by RKO in 1942 to quickly produce horror films akin to Universal's, but fought against bureaucratic pressures of RKO's executives (Bansak 2003, Russell 2006: 41-46, Schatz 1997: 232, Wells 2000: 55-56). Lewton received unusually loose-directives from his superiors: no film could exceed $150,000 or seventy-five minutes of runtime and he had to utilize "pre-tested" titles sent from above (Bansak 2003: 89). Provided these demands could be met, Lewton could fashion the films as he pleased. *I Walked with a Zombie* was based on the title of a popular article by Inez Wallace, but the film bears little resemblance to it. Instead, Lewton and his crew devoted considerable time to researching Vodou and loosely

adapted Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* ([1847] 2006). According to biographer Edmund Bansak (2003: 162), RKO's front office had little hope in *I Walked with a Zombie*'s commercial prospects, the moody, slow-moving, and atmospheric horror film resemble no other despite RKO specifically bringing in Universal's horror scriptwriter Curt Siodmak. *Film Daily* (1943a: 6) displayed similar skepticism, "[t]his shocker, lacking in action, will require a lot of plugging … even devotees of horror films, which make the ideal audience for this exhibit, will find it tough to extract more than a passing amount of entertainment." Despite RKO's frustration with Lewton, nearly all his films turned a profit (Bansak 2003), only *Cat People* (1942) received sequel treatment. Lewton left the studio after the death of Charles Koerner in 1946, his chief supporter, struggling in the industry thereafter until his own death in 1951.

Beginning in the late-1930s and accelerating across the 1940s several extra-industrial events disrupted the majors' cornering of the B market. Production costs slowly escalated and because the majors desired to produce high-quality Bs the rising production costs influenced many of them to curtail and sometimes eliminate B productions (Moak 1940, *Variety* 1943a, *New York Times* 1946). Then, on 20 July 1938, the first *Paramount* antitrust case was filed which charged the Big Five with "combining and conspiring to restrain trade unreasonably and to monopolize production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures" (Conant 1960: 94) and the Little Three with "combining with the five majors to restrain trade unreasonably and to monopolize commerce in motion pictures" (ibid.). In late 1940, the government and the Big Five signed a consent decree prohibiting the practices of blind-selling (the forced buying of films without the chance of viewing them) and limiting block-blocking to five pictures. The Little Three refused to sign the

decree. The impact of the decree was almost immediate as major studios began phasing out B-films, choosing to emphasize production values and star power (Tzioumakis 2006: 48). As Tzioumakis (2006: 83) observes, "[t]he repercussion of this move by the studios was that the decidedly B films of the Poverty Row firms were the only contenders for the bottom half of double bills." In short time, Poverty Row's production numbers would explode (*Los Angeles Times* 1940; *Variety* 1941a, 1943e, 1944a) with Monogram announcing a record-high fifty films for production during the 1941-1942 season (*New York Times* 1941) and record profits (*Variety* 1941a). By the mid-1940s, Monogram accounted for ten per cent of cinematic productions in the United States (Onosko 1972: 6). A small part of Poverty Row's expansion included the intentional production of several zombie-centered films.

5.3 Poverty Row: Generic Purity, Distributive Security

Poverty Row's entree into horror film production was factored by their productive logic and industry-wide trends discussed above (*Los Angeles Times* 1939a, 1940). The spread of double billing created an enviable problem for the majors with demand for pictures exceeded their ability supply (Scott 1935). Because B-films sold at flat rates and raked in tiny profits in certain locales (Churchill 1936, Jacobs 1934), major studios had little financial incentive to pursue all markets and/or innovative low-budget films beyond the trivial alterations they made to their tried and tested B-film models. Headlined by Republic Pictures, Monogram, and Producers Releasing Corporation, Poverty Row studios existed on the outskirts of the filmmaking industry, initially supplying B-films to towns the majors did not penetrate before expanding operations after the 1940 decree (Tzioumakis 2006: 82-84). Poverty Row's "reputation" was characterized by low-

budgets, unknown film talent, and hastily cobbled together cinematic craftsmanship (Weaver 1993). According to Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy (1975: 21), "[t]heir objective was to produce pure entertainment as cheaply as possible and to earn a tidy profit." Poverty Row studios achieved their objective and survived by offering low-budget fair distinctive from the major studios, but they often lacked the ability to freely produce their own innovative cinema (Weaver 1993: ix-xvi). Just like the majors, Poverty Row entered the horror genre just after Universal's reissue of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* (*Los Angeles Times* 1940). The majors cornered the most high-profile horror protagonists, leaving Poverty Row to produce horror films like *The Ape* (1940), *The Devil Bat* (1940), *The Corpse Vanishes* (1941), *Invisible Ghost* (1931), *Black Dragons* (1942), *The Mad Monster* (1942), *Bluebeard* (1944), and *The Girl Who Dared* (1944) among others. Between 1940 and 1946 Poverty Row studios produced five zombie films: *King of the Zombies*, *Revenge of the Zombies*, *Voodoo Man*, *Face of Marble*, and *Valley of the Zombies*. While each film contains hybridized aspects (mostly mad science), with the exception of *Face of Marble*, all the films exploit either voodoo or zombie in their titles and foreground zombies in their narrative (see Platts forthcoming*b*). The employment of zombies is intentional and constitutes the major selling point of the films. Though more homogenous than the studios' "zombie films," Poverty Row's direct handling, foregrounding, and intentional minor alterations to zombies that makes them more innovative. Unlike the major studios, Poverty Row experimented with the narrative structure of zombies rather than adding zombies to other narrative structures, this is, in part, why Poverty Row still maintained zombies' vestigial link to voodoo/Haiti.

Since the majors ignored the zombies as horror protagonists, an opportunity space was opened for the intentional embracement of zombie-centered horror films by Poverty Row. Poverty Row's material auspice was not to compete, but to fill a market niche by supplying cheaply made bottom billers to subsequent-run theaters. Profits for individual films averaged less than $2000 (Churchill 1936, Flynn and McCarthy 1975: 24, Russell 2006: 34, Weaver 1993: xiii), but rapid turnover and high demand for product enabled Poverty Row studios to survive and sometimes thrive in the shadows of the majors' oligopoly (Edwards 2011, Jacobs 1934). Thus, any bankable, reasonably retrievable narrative elements not exploited by the majors could and often did come under the purview of Poverty Row (Flynn and McCarthy 1975). The most peculiar aspect of Poverty Row's zombie films, however, is the fact that all of them were produced after 1940. Poverty Row's decision to pursue zombie films after 1940 was obviously factored by the 1940 Paramount decree, but the cessation of *Amusement Securities Corporation v. Academy Pictures Distribution Corporation* was likely significant as well as producing a zombie-centered would no longer involve potential legal hurdles. Poverty Row also responded to general trends when fashioning their production schedules (*Los Angeles Times* 1940, 1941). Just one year after the injunction, Monogram released *King of the Zombies* which bore strong similarities to both *White Zombie* (in terms of the treatment of voodoo and the similarities between Dr. Miklos Sangre and Murder Legendre) and *The Ghost Breakers* (with regards to its use of comedy). *King of the Zombies*' pressbook even instructs exhibitors to advertise it along the lines of *The Ghost Breakers* (Weaver 1993: 37). Monogram then released *Revenge of the Zombies* just after *I Walked with a Zombie* demonstrated continued consumer interest in voodoo-themed zombie films. *Revenge of*

the Zombies, however, has nothing to do with *I Walked with a Zombie*, but is a near remake of *King of the Zombies* (the most significant variation the importation of zombies to the Louisiana bayou in *Revenge of the Zombies*). *Voodoo Man* was released two-years later and relied on the top-billing of genre stars George Zucco, John Carradine, and Bela Lugosi as *Film Daily*'s (1944: 6) review suggested. Monogram's final zombie film, *Face of Marble* whose narrative oscillates between aspects of mad science and voodoo was released in 1946. According to Tom Weaver (1993: 233), "[p]art of the problem with *Face of Marble* is that it doesn't know what it wants to be." Poverty Row's final zombie film during the studio-era, *Valley of the Zombies*, was Republic Pictures only zombie production; however, despite the *Valley of the Zombies* title, it delivers something different in its storyline as I discussed in the first pages of this chapter.

Poverty Row's production of zombie-centered films allowed them to sometimes splice in temporalized anxieties. *King of the Zombies* and *Revenge of the Zombies*, for example, manage to work concerns of Nazism into their plots. *Film Daily*'s (1943b: 5) review of *Revenge of the Zombies* noted: "[t]he [zombie] tale is brought up to date by making the medical meddler a German who intends to take his master zombie back to the old country with him and use it as a pattern for an army of automatons that will spell victory for Nazi arms." *Variety* (1943b: 20) similarly remarked, "[*Revenge of the* Zombies] tries to tie in a war-tempoed motif with the zombie creator this time portrayed as a mad medico operating in the U.S. bayou country who also turns out to be a Nazi agent and tires to convert his army of 'between life and death' creatures to Hitler's use." Another *Variety* (1943d: 3) review claims that *Revenge of the Zombies* brought the "standard zombie plot up to date" by imbuing it with a "Nazi angle … a crazy medico

visions creating of walking dead to make the fuehrer invincible in his world rule aims." *Voodoo Man*, *Face of Marble*, and *Valley of the Zombies* were intended for horror aficionados (Weaver 1993). *Film Daily* (1944:6) specifically remarked of *Voodoo Man*, "horror fans will be interested in this new offering." *Face of Marble* received cryptic commentary as reviewers struggled what to make of it, "it is a strange mixture of electronics, voodoo, kilocycles, yarbs and spooky dogs that walk right through locked doors without so much as knocking" (*Variety* 1946a: 3). *Variety* (1946b) saw *Valley of the Zombies* as "a bid for chills and thrills with a character who classes as part zombie and part vampire, retaining the standard horror features of both."

Despite their lack of polish and quality, Poverty Row's horror films exhibit an amazing amount of innovativeness (see Weaver 1993 for plot descriptions) when compared to the major studios' horror films (see Tudor 1989: 27-33 for a content analytic discussion of 1930s horror narratives). Poverty Row's horrors failed on account of their paltry material auspices, not a lack of ingenuity; as Tom Weaver explained (1993: xii): "[t]he unfortunate part about the Monogram horror films is that in some ways, a number of them came awfully close to being halfway decent; all they needed was a bit more polish, and a good writer to fiddle with the scripts and the dialogue. Monogram's horror scripts were notoriously bad, but somewhere in them – buried in incoherent dialogue and goofy plot twists – were often ideas that had a good bit of unrealized potential." Poverty Row could rely on zombies who required little by of special-effects, did not rely on well versed thespians, and the pay for non-speaking extras like zombies was considerably lower than speaking parts (Russell 2006: 35). In the 1940s zombies were becoming for Monogram what Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, and the Wolf-man were to Universal

with Tom Weaver (1993: 140) documenting Monogram's failed plans to produce *When Zombies Walked* (planned for 1944) and *Voodoo Queen* (planned for 1945). Just as industrial events abetted Poverty Row's brief spurt of zombie films, so too did events factor in their demise.

Understanding Poverty Row's abandonment of zombie films and Poverty Row's shifts in production strategies in the mid-1940s necessitates a further elaboration of Poverty Row's distribution practices. In contrast to the major studios who booked B-films in their own (and other majors') theaters, Poverty Row sold their films directly to independent (subsequent-run) exhibitors. Direct dealings with territorial distributors and exhibitors allowed Poverty Row more flexibility in their product lines as they could cater to certain markets (Edwards 2011). According to Brian Taves (1993: 326) Poverty Row studios directed certain genre films to specific theaters and audience demographics (e.g. rural, black, and immigrant audiences) audiences which were different from the urban, middle-class cinema-goers maintained by the majors. Ultimately, this meant that Poverty Row studios could pursue zombie-centered films (among other types of films) to exhibitors receptive to them (Tzioumakis 2006: 42). *King of the Zombies,* for example, played in small metropolitan areas like Lincoln, Nebraska with box-office results often better than mainstream films (*Variety* 1941b: 11, 1941c: 12). *Revenge of the Zombies* and *Voodoo Man* did exceptionally well in Providence, Rhode Island, again outperforming mainstream films (e.g. *Variety* 1943c: 16; 1945a: 14). Poverty Row's zombie films even played in rural towns like Van Wert, Ohio and Iola, Kansas which were barely broached by the majors. The profits were small, but the dominance of the studios required independent filmmakers to eke-out profits in subsequent-run markets (Flynn and

McCarthy 1975, Gomery 2005). Zombies lack of ties to successful or well-known European culture meant the development of zombie films had to occur outside the risk averse standardizing forces of Hollywood moviemaking which produced ready-made films with built-in audiences. Studio disinterest in zombies turned into Poverty Row's opportunity space. Zombie films' parochial successes provided Poverty Row a (barely) profitable investment for a brief period time. Changing industry conditions, however, caused the favorability of zombie films to dwindle. In 1946, when Hollywood reached unprecedented heights of profitability, Monogram and Republic Pictures began shifting their funds to A-level productions with Monogram rechristening themselves Allied Artists (Flynn and McCarthy 1975: 30-31, 34; Tzioumakis 2006: 88-90). Poverty Row's shift to A-productions occurred when B-films were beginning to lose their appeal, production costs continued rising, and audience attendance diminished, putting less confidence in low-rent niche catered films (like Poverty Row's zombie films) (Tzioumakis 2006: 88-90). Indeed, after 1946, Monogram and Republic virtually abandoned horror films and left zombies out in the cold (Weaver 1993).

5.4 Endogenous Genre Ecology: Un-Zombie Zombies Are Zombies Too

Between the years 1936 and 1946, zombies demonstrated tremendous narrative elasticity in radio, short stories, comic strips, and to a lesser extent cinema (Hand 2011, Pulliam 2007, Vials 2011), but they were still associated with Other cultures. *White Zombie* associated zombies with Haiti, *Revolt of the Zombies* with Cambodia, *The Ghost Breakers* with Cuba, and undisclosed Caribbean islands in *Love Wanga*, *King of the Zombies,* and *I Walked with a Zombie*. Given that reviewers placed zombies in like *The Walking Dead* and *The Return of the Living*, it is a matter of puzzlement that zombies

were not seen in films like *Dead Men Walk* (1940), *The Mad Ghoul* (1943), *The Man They Could Not Hang* (1939), and *Man with Nine Lives* (1940) which could have just as easily garnered the label. This sort of inconsistency is not uncommon and has been repeatedly documented by scholars interested in generic labeling practices (see Neale 1993, Jancovich 2010, Snelson 2009). Today, few zombie historiographers consider *The Walking Dead* a zombie film[7] and none, to my knowledge, include *The Return of Dr. X*. My task is not to exclude these films because they do not meet modern understandings of zombie films. Ideas matter, *The Walking Dead* and *The Return of Dr. X* are not discussed as zombie classics today, but the willingness of a handful of reviewers in the late-1930s to see zombies in both films reveals a protean quality to zombies that would matter later on. With the cement of the zombie mold still wet, producers could freely sculpt the monster to their whims and zombies could appear in creatures much a Rorschach inkblot. The lack of consistent ideas concerning zombies could potentially produce wildly different creatures if different material relations lay behind their creation as I describe next chapter.

Turning back to where this chapter began, *Valley of the Zombies*' "non-zombie controversy" arose in nearly every review of the film. *Variety* (1946c: 10) wrote it, "features an unzombie-like zombie" but the next paragraph of the review broke its prior incredulity "Ian Keith plays a big-city zombie on a lost weekend for blood" (ibid.). *Film Daily*'s (1946: 10) skepticism was more subtle, "[t]he 'zombie' with whom the picture deals, is of a peculiar breed, looking more like the personification of demon rum in the old mellers." Significantly, none of the reviewers defended the true virtues of "real

[7] Peter Dendle (2001) leaves *The Walking Dead* out of his *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*, but Jamie Russell includes it both as part of his analysis and filmography of *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema*.

zombies," in part, because there were no virtues to defend and, in part, because the zombie lacked an anchoring literary heritage to tell reviewers what an "authentic zombie" should look and act like. Such "credulous-incredulity" for "unzombie-zombies" most likely would not have been accepted for higher class B-films like Dracula and Frankenstein's monster; *Valley of the Zombies* was a zombie film because, despite criticisms to the contrary, no one said it was not.

5.5 Boom and Bust: The Antitrust Decree of 1948

Film historian Thomas Schatz (1997: 131) describes the 1940s as "the best of times and worst of times for the American film industry." During and immediately after World War II, theatergoing became a social ritual. Escalating attendance – fueled by returning service men and women – provided a general boost to the filmmaking industries, but the lion's share of profit concentrated in studio owned and first-run markets while a smaller number of features began earning more money (Gomery 2005, Schatz 1997: 153). The studios and Poverty Row reduced B-film production just before audience attendance plummeted because suburban expansion de-ritualized cinema-going (Doherty 2002: 19-23, Heffernan 2004: 7-12). Located in cities, first-run theaters lost their primary revenue source and traditional B-films, with their guaranteed profits, became less tenable as profit margins on flat rates decayed. Then on 3 May 1948, the Supreme Court ruled against the major studios in the *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.* which determined vertical integration, block booking, and excessive clearances constituted illegal restraint of trade (Heffernan 2004: 5). The Big Five signed decrees to sell off their theaters and stop block booking altogether. This extra-industrial event began a period of monumental change for all aspects of film production. Majors

sunk funds into bigger productions in the hopes of maximizing profits (Hall and Neale 2010: 155-158, Schatz 1993, *Variety* 1951a) and Poverty Row struggled to stay afloat (Davis 2012: 1-12). During the immediate and tumultuous aftermath only two zombie films saw the light of day: *Scared Stiff* and *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, both produced by Paramount and both resembling previous studio "zombie films" in that both inserted zombies into already popular trends.

Scared Stiff was the ninth film to feature the popular duo of Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin. It was essentially a remake of *The Ghost Breakers*, but designed around the talents its leading men. Zombies appear only at the film's conclusion to less than one-minute of screen-time in a one-hundred-eight minute narrative. *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* does not evoke zombies, rather *Variety*'s (1953: 3) review explains "[a]dditional fun comes from doctor's … zombie-like assistant." Of course, the film builds on the "Abbott and Costello Meet" series made popular by *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948). Both films sport large budgets with *Scared Stiff* tying for thirtieth in box-office revenues, a feat rarely achieved by a horror-themed film at the time (Arneel 1954: 10). Both films are not to be confused with typical B-films previously produced by the studios, their budgets and polish share more in common with films produced during the immediate post-Decree era when traditional B-films disappeared (Davis 2012: 1-14). As the studio-era ended, Hollywood would reestablish itself (Lev 2003: 1-6) and new kinds of B-films emerged (Davis 2012, Flynn and McCarthy 1975: 34-37).

5.6 Conclusion

Zombie films' endogenous genre ecology may, at any one point in time, seem limited, but zombie films are deeply steeped into the material and temporal milieus of their production. Not only do they respond to other zombie films, they are also temporally contextualized and influenced extant production trends, most obviously, horror film trends. Bringing in Nazi experimentation into *Revenge of the Zombies* and *King of the Zombies* may seem banal, but such plot devices implemented a ratchet effect (Lieberson 2000: 92-111) and helped shift the ecological boundaries of what a zombie is and how it could be deployed in filmic texts. The Nazi angle appeared in recalibrated form in 1955's *Creature with the Atom Brain* (discussed next chapter) with further variations showing up in *The Unearthly* (1957), *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959), and *Monstrosity* (1963).

Zombie films did not flourish in the studio-era despite their tremendous malleable potential. The studios' oligopolistic industry structure allowed them to control cinematic output with independent and exploitation filmmakers left to wallow over box-office crumbs. Conditioned by Universal's reissue of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* the studios placed confidence in producing relatively small menagerie of monsters and, instead, concentrated more on prestige pictures, musicals, women's films, comedy, and social problems films (Balio 1993: 179-312). The intra-industrial practice of unit-production further mitigated what types of horror films would be produced, mostly jettisoning experimental or otherwise untried boogeymen like zombies. Studio produced "zombie films" occurred reflexively as a byproduct of unit-production which introduced minor variations to prior films that were recognized as zombies or placed the creature in the

periphery of familiar storylines. The comparative popularity of zombies in *White Zombie* and *The Ghost Breakers* filtered through the studios' slackening of B-film production, the ending of a court injunction against using zombies in film titles, and the 1940 Paramount decree encouraged Poverty Row studios, particularly Monogram, to briefly explore a cycle zombie-centered films. The brief flurry of Poverty Row zombie films, however, was augured by a unique set of industry conditions that made pursuing low-budget, low profit yielding films a viable business option. When these conditions disappeared, so did cinematic zombies. Poverty Row did not abandon zombie films because of diminishing returns, however, but followed of a general industry turn toward A-level productions. That is to say, Poverty Row studios abandoned the preferences of their niche audiences to cater to a broader audience. With the dismantling of the studios by the antitrust decree, the production system that defined classical Hollywood cinema was no longer sustainable (Doherty 2002: 17), and so too were zombie films. Heading into the post-studio the fate of zombie films was uncertain. New opportunity spaces would emerge, but new risks would also merge. New companies were erected to cater to the low-end of the business, but they placed more faith in capitalizing on passing cultural trends than traditional genre films (Doherty 2002, Flynn and McCarthy 1975: 34-37). Zombies' immediate transition capacity, still mostly identified with voodoo, stunted its ability to fit into the opportunity spaces exploited by filmmakers across the spectrum in the immediate post-studio era. However, with the blending of horror and science fiction in the 1950s and zombies' loose endogenous genre ecology, zombies were sure to reemerge, and as we shall see, the small innovations introduced by Poverty Row and the inconsistent labeling of the studios' "zombie films" would factor large in the post-studio era.

Chapter 6 : "Zombie Pix Upbeat & Durable": Science Fiction, Teenagers, and Voodoo in 1950s and 1960s Zombie Cinema

6.1 "The Worst [Period] for the Production of Films About the Living Dead?": Introduction

Zombie films metamorphosed drastically in the 1950s and 1960s. The end of the United States' military occupation of Haiti, post-war temperaments fraught with ambiguous anxiety, and the complete remaking of the filmmaking industries rendered the notion of zombies as crocheted from the imagined calculus of Black mysticism transitionally unviable for most filmmakers. The zombie idea, however, the insensate walking dead, was simply too good and too flexible an idea to let go. It is during the timeframe covered in this chapter, 1955 to 1966, that "zombies" became subsumed under a production trend the industry called "weirdies," or low- to moderate-budget films typically involving (laughable) creatures and usually infused with over-the-top ballyhoo and/or technological gimmickry (e.g. 3-D, Smell-o-Vision, Percepto!).[8] Indicative of zombies' metamorphosis was *Variety*'s (1959: 4) review of *First Man Into Space* (1959), a British-produced science fiction horror film, which read "[w]hen [the first man into space] returns to earth he is coated with some mysterious substance composed of meteor dust and has been changed into a blood-sucking monster. There is the usual pursuit and eventual capture of the *zombie*" (emphasis added). The "blood-sucking monster" in *First Man Into Space* bears little resemblance to anything considered a zombie during the studio era, but is congruent with the "zombies" described by *Variety* (1956a) in an article

[8] Smell-o-Vision was a system that released odors into theaters during films, allowing viewers to "smell" what was happening in the film. Percepto! was the brainchild and one of William Castle's many gimmicks which involved fitting theater seats with vibrators to correspond with high tension scenes in the movie.

published just three years prior. *Variety*'s article, entitled "Zombie Pix Upbeat & Durable" (1956a: 11), purportedly about "zombie films," did not once mention voodoo, Haiti, or any other term "traditionally" associated with the Caribbean boogeyman, instead, it discussed films "either in the space or chiller-diller category" which included films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *Creature with the Atom Brain* (1955); pictures like *The Walking Dead* (1936) and *The Return of Dr. X* (1939) that were not marketed or produced with zombies in mind and are today regarded as science fiction films. The "Zombie Pix" article tenders an invaluable document in understanding the evolution of zombies and zombie cinema insofar as it shows discursive understandings and applications of the monster supplanted older ideas well before *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). In this vein, my primary aim of this chapter is to uncover the magnitude of the zombie's diffusive expansion, flexibility, and filmmakers' conscientious deployment of zombies in a period often elided or downplayed in prevailing historiographies. Taking the time to consider the zombie films between "white zombies" and "night zombies" shows that they serve as a pivotal evolutionary link between the Caribbean boogeyman and the flesheating monster we know today.

Before an otherwise perceptive (albeit short) chapter in his social history of zombie cinema, Jamie Russell (2006: 47) proclaimed the period I consider in this chapter, "the worst … for the production of films about the living dead." Not echoed outright, but carried out in analytic orientation, scholars like Kyle Bishop (2010a) and Peter Dendle (2007) give scant attention to the post-studio-but-pre-Romero-zombies thereby delivering an incomplete understanding of its popular cultural evolution. The account I offer in this chapter – focusing on the post-studio material and temporal conditions that buoyed the

filmmaking industries – provides a much different story than scholarly doxa. Even though the primary conceptualization of zombies as monsters conjured from the mysterious powers of voodoo lacked the capacity to transition into the material auspices of nearly all strata of filmmaking described below, these stifling conditions aided by zombies' endogenous genre ecology (described in previous chapters) ironically recalibrated and proliferated new understandings of zombies, resulting in a surprising breadth and wealth of productions in a timeframe seen as fallow and inconsequential.

In previous chapters I have pointed out inconsistent interpretations and understandings of zombies, but the seventeen "zombie" films produced during the scope of this chapter accelerate these inconsistencies to the point of appealing random and chaotic. I argue that order can be found in this apparent disorder. That is, the apparent disorderly reconstitution of zombie cinema actually followed a series of simple processes: short-term goals of producers, inconsistencies in monster attributions, and the ratcheting a hazily defined monster. To bring order to one of the most confusing periods in zombies' history, I draw upon the same framework used in prior chapters. Toward this end I identify three distinct, juncturally overlapping intergeneric cycles of zombie cinema that lasted from 1955 to 1966 (see tables 6.1 to 6.3). The zombie cycles include: science fiction inflected zombie films (1955-1964), teenpic or youth-oriented zombie films (1959-1966), and attempts to resuscitate voodoo-themed zombie films (1957-1964). Each zombie cycle adapted zombies to "capitalize on current events, trends, fads, and the success of other films" (Klein 2011: 6). Distributed by the majors and independents, in science fiction inflected zombie films filmmakers (mostly unwittingly) attempted to capitalize on the popularity of low-budget science fiction films and updated the idea of

zombies, the mindless walking dead, for a society imbricated with fears of soviet invasion, homogenizing internal forces, and anxiety concerning scientific advancement. Produced exclusively from modest means and mostly independently distributed, in teenpic zombie films independent filmmakers tried to cash-in on the runaway successes of American International Picture's (AIP) foray into the horror genre by exploiting increases in teenage audiences and tailoring zombie narratives around teenage or otherwise young protagonists. Evincing slight randomness, in the voodoo-themed zombie films of this period filmmakers endeavored to capitalize in renewed interest in offbeat horror films by reacquainting zombies with their xenophobic origins, an effort that ultimately failed. My examination in this chapter distills the co-constitutive influences of situational production goals, mercurial labeling practices and ideas, and zombies' temporalized ecological blueprint in the recalibration of genre without creating a new one.

Table 6.1: Science Fiction Themed Zombie Films

Film	Year	Producer	Distributor
The Creature with the Atom Brain	1955	Clover	Columbia
Invasion of the Body Snatchers	1956	Allied Artists	Allied Artists
Unearthly	1957	AB-PT Pictures Corp.	Republic
First Man Into Space	1959	Amalgamated Productions	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Invisible Invaders	1959	Robert E. Kent Productions	United Artists
Plan 9 From Outer Space	1959	Reynolds Pictures	International Film Distributors
Monstrosity	1963	Cinema Venture	Emerson Film Enterprises
The Last Man on Earth	1964	Associated Producers and Produzioni La Regina	American International Pictures

Table 6.2: Youth/Teenage Oriented Zombie Films

Film	Year	Producer	Distributor
Teenage Zombies	1957	GBM Productions	Governor Films
Cape Canaveral Monsters	1960	Compagnia Cinematografica Montoro	Independently Released
The Incredibly Strange Creatures…	1964	Morgan-Steckler Productions	Fairway International Pictures
The Horror at Party Beach	1964	Iselin-Tenney Productions	Twentieth Century-Fox
Orgy of the Dead	1965	Astra Productions	F.O.G. Distributors

Table 6.3: Voodoo-Themed Zombie Films

Film	Year	Producer	Distributor
Voodoo Island	1957	Bel-Air Productions	United Artists
The Zombies of Mora Tau	1957	Clover	Columbia
Blood of the Zombie	1961	Mardi Gras Productions Inc.	Mardi Gras Productions Inc.
I Eat Your Skin	1964	Iselin-Tenney Productions	Prima Film

Before analyzing the three zombie cycles, however, I provide an orienting context by highlighting significant changes witnessed by the filmmaking industries in the immediate post-studio era, honing in on a number of new opportunity spaces and zombies' problematic transition capacity. After assessing the zombie cycles, I gauge zombies' ecological alterations. As Shawn McIntosh (2008: 7) observed, "What the zombie movies of the 1950s and early 1960s did do, however, was further expand the limits of what zombies could be and how they could appear, even to the point of portraying zombies as mutated, irradiated, humanoid fish as in *The Horror of Party Beach.*" Like other scholars (e.g. Bishop 2010a: 65; Dendle 2001: 4-5, 2007: 49-50; McIntosh 2008: 7; Pulliam 2007: 732-734; Russell 2006: 47-54), I typify the period as one of transition, but instead of downplaying the era's zombie films because of their aesthetic failures I highlight their role in ratcheting a sea change in zombies' internal dynamics. It is in the films covered below that endogenous generic elements such as voodoo, racism, colonialism, and outright xenophobia were supplanted by fears of invasion, social homogenization, apocalyptic narrative, and just plain "weirdness." In sum, this period of zombie films initiated the dawn of a new dead.

6.2 Major Changes in the Post-Studio Era

Film historian Peter Lev (2003: 3) identifies five major themes of 1950s Hollywood: "the challenge from television, the decline of the studio system, the rise of independent production, the introduction of new technologies, [and] the importance of

overseas production." A twenty-five year decline in film attendance (Murphy 1978: 71) and government mandated divorcement of exhibition from distribution and production punctuated these factors and influenced new modes of production for all levels of filmmaking (Davis 2012). To bring back audiences, producers began placing greater emphasis on "blockbuster" productions designed to attract large audiences and technological gimmickry to cover for poor production values (Heffernan 2004: 4-10, Lev 2003: 10-12, Monaco 2001: 11). With the demise of the studio system, motion pictures started selling and started production on a film-by-film basis, making the process a more precarious enterprise (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985: 330-337; King 2002: 24-35; Schatz 1993: 8). The production of films on a film-by-film basis became known as the package-unit system wherein producers brought together talent (e.g. scriptwriter, director, actors, etc.) through contractual agreements as a basis for securing a financing and a distribution deal with a (major) studio (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson 1985: 330-337; Davis 2012: 23; Monaco 2001: 25). Though opportunity spaces opened for low-end filmmakers (see Davis 2012, Doherty 2002, Heffernan 2004), those opportunities were saddled with tremendous risks that made the production of Caribbean-based zombie films unwise. The near guarantee of all films finding an audience because of robust theatergoing public that buttressed Poverty Row's (zombie) productions during the studio-era no longer existed and the zombie films they had produced could not neatly transition into the emerging material auspices of low-budget production (Davis 2012: 19-42; Heffernan 2004; Stanfield 2010, 2013; *Variety* 1951a, 1952).

Film costs ballooned during the 1950s (*Variety* 1957d) causing low-budget producers to become more innovative. Once rare, million-dollar-plus budgets became

commonplace after 1953 (Maltby 2003: 162). The disappearance of traditional double bills and the poor pulling power of B-films influenced studios like Warner Bros. and Twentieth Century-Fox to drop their B-units and stop producing B-films altogether (Doherty 2002: 25, Monaco 2001: 10) as *Variety* (1951a: 5) reported, "[p]ic product of the calibre [sic] which had been drawing moderate [box-office] return in the past is now resulting in deficit operations, particularly in first-run locations." Under these conditions low-budget filmmaking evolved from a secondary position in the industry to an innovative position (Davis 2012: 1) with a new breed of low-end producers constructing new genre cycles, targeting specific demographic clusters, and employing new marketing approaches (Flynn and McCarthy 1975: 34-37, Davis 2012: 67-112, Doherty 2002: 24-31, Heffernan 2004: 12-14, Stanfield 2010: 438-441) whose successes were coopted by the majors in the late-1950s (*Variety* 1957a, 1957c). The confluence of the emerging conditions in filmmaking factored into the production of two types of films: rechristened B-films that were low-budget, formulaic, and opportunistic in exploiting ephemeralized social phenomena (e.g. rock 'n' roll, youth in revolt, youth at play, drugs, sexual liberation, and newspaper headlines) instead of traditional genres like westerns (Flynn and McCarthy 1975: 34-35, Stanfield 2010: 441-443) and blockbuster films with inflating budgets (Doherty 2002: 24-28, Schatz 1993: 11-13, *Variety* 1951a). Zombies would have to undergo substantial alterations in their ecology in order to fit the material auspices. Crucially, the two studios most associated with 1950s and 1960s horror films, Hammer and AIP, ignored zombies with the former reworking Hollywood's Gothic monsters and the latter adapting horror narratives for teenage clientele. Others would have to produce zombie films. Because of zombies nomadism during the 1950s and 1960s, understanding

the coalescence of the three zombie cycles I identify offers a unique perspective concerning the operation of social forces in the (re)making of cultural objects.

6.3 "It Pays to Be 'Weird'": Science Fiction Zombie Films

The monsters populating 1950s and 1960s horror films came in many shapes, sizes, and biological classifications (for overviews see Skal 2001: 229-261, Tudor 1989: 39-47, Wells 2000: 56-73). Commentators typically agree the temporal shifts in monstrous embodiments dovetail into the cultural and historical contexts of the era (Jancovich 1996: 1-5, Maddrey 2004: 30-38, O'Donnell 2003: 169-174, Skal 2001: 247-255, Tudor 1989: 39-40, Wells 2000: 56-58). Postwar social and technological changes received praise in magazines and advertisements, people confronted their uneasiness from the safety of a theater seat. As Karen Cerulo (2006: 70) observes, it is "in the campy fantasy arena of horror films, where individuals are encouraged to suspend reality and disbelief, we become able to consider, momentarily, the unthinkably dark side of life." The terrifying knowledge inherited from World War II, Nazism, and the birth of atomic weaponry took center stage in horror films which began fusing with science fiction (*Los Angeles Times* 1956a) until the sociopolitical turmoil of sixties placed atomic fears into campy territory (Prince 2000b). Hoping to profit from prescient issues, filmmakers routinely inserted into their science fiction inflected horror films contemporary issues such as the consequences of nuclear disaster, the Red Scare, UFO sightings, the dawn of space travel, news of scientific experiment and discovery, and the hard-to-articulate uneasiness felt by many Americans (O'Donnell 2003: 172-173, Sconce 1995, Skal 2001: 239-255).

Given the welter of silver creations emerging as a byproduct of the new material and temporal auspices of production, it is unsurprising that zombie-like creatures appeared in a number of science fiction (horror) films. Specifically eight science fiction-centered "zombie films" received release between 1955 and 1964: *Creature with the Atom Brain* (1955), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *First Man Into Space*, *The Unearthly* (1959), *Invisible Invaders* (1959), *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959), *Monstrosity* (1963), and *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) each of which can be catalogued into Victoria O'Donnell's (2003: 173) quadripartite thematic analysis of science fiction films with some variations. *First Man Into Space* grafts onto O'Donnell's (2003: 174-177) extraterrestrial travel theme insofar as its narrative exploits space travel as something to fear. Produced between Sputnik's launch (1957) and Yuri Gagarin's outer space orbit of Earth, *First Man Into Space*'s producer Richard Gordon attempted to capitalize on popular interest in space travel and the unknown effects of interstellar travel on the human body (Weaver and Gordon 2006). One of its posters read, "It Leaps Ahead of the Headlines!" *Creature with the Atom Brain, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Invisible Invaders, Plan 9 from Outer Space,* and *The Last Man on Earth* evince aspects of O'Donnell's (2003: 177-185) theme of alien invasion and infiltration. Excepting *The Last Man on Earth,* the five films' aliens or subversive interlopers exhibit technological and intellectual superiority to US Americans and utilize tactics of outright destruction or infiltration. The tagline to *Invisible Invaders* captured both aspects of the invasion and infiltration theme, "[a]n unearthly enemy defying modern science in a war to the death of all civilization!" O'Donnell's (2003: 185-191) theme of mutants, metamorphosis is loosely captured by *The Unearthly* and *Monstrosity* in that both films depict the deranged

experimentations of mad scientists. Doubling up, *Creature with the Atom Brain*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Invisible Invaders, Plan 9 from Outer Space,* and *The Last Man on Earth* also display aspects of O'Donnell's (2003: 191-194) near annihilation or the end of earth theme with each employing some variation of an apocalyptic narrative.

Reflectionist analyses of fifties and sixties science fiction films maintain an allegorical correspondence to specific historical nodes of social anxieties (e.g. Hendershot 2001, Jancovich 1996, O'Donnell 2003), ignoring the profitability that mobilized and influenced their production. Reporting on the fortunes of a trio of low-budget sci-fi films – *Destination Moon* (1950), *Rocketship X-M* (1950), and *Man from Planet X* (1951) – *Variety* (1951b: 22) predicted a cycle of similar films as filmmakers would surely notice the financial rewards they could reap from pursuing the favorability of the material (see also Schallert 1952: 10). Throughout the 1950s *Variety* (1956a, 1956b, 1957c, 1957e) reported on the startling receipts of what came to be known as "weirdies," films described by the trades as those "that broadly fall into the monster-horror-science fiction category" (*Variety* 1957e: 3). With intra-industrial event of B-films redesigned to capitalize on cultural trends and the extra-industrial event of sci-fi regularly displaying audience appeal, low-budget filmmakers flooded theaters with cut-rate science fiction films. Ironically, despite the imaginations' of filmmakers creating all manner of monster for atomic age consumers, none explicitly deploy zombies as central to storyline or advertising, reviewers and critics countersigned zombies to the films. As such, within film depictions of "zombies" exhibit no across film patterns, though all are humanoid. To make sense of the attributed presence of zombies in non-zombie science fiction films, I

delineate the opportunity spaces that filmmakers took advantage of and further develop some observations I made earlier in this chapter.

As suggested earlier the profits of *Destination Moon*, *Rocketship X-M*, and *Man from Planet X* were extra-industrial events that suggested to filmmakers and studio gatekeepers that money could be made from further production and distribution low-budget sci-fi films. In the immediate aftermath of the *Paramount* case, major studios' material auspice experimented with big-budget blockbuster films that had high potential payoffs (Hall and Neale 2010: 135-158) while studio low-budget operations were on the wane (Davis 2010: 19-66). Even though the salability of "weirdies" had been established by 1951 (*Variety* 1951b), only Universal of the major studios placed confidence in them as *Variety* (1956b) posited "[t]he industry which is turning to blockbuster, long-running pictures is wondering if Universal can continue to compete successfully under current market conditions facing the motion picture industry." Once Universal established a major studio could profit from modest budgeted weirdies (*Variety* 1956a, 1956b), other majors and low-end independent producers rushed to action (*Variety* 1957a, 1957c, 1957d). Reporting on the intra-industrial trend *Variety* (1957a: 17) documented "[i]ncrease in major studio production in 1957, after three years of slackened activity, is seen in the sudden resurgence of interest in 'B' product." Not only did renewed industry interest sire a number of weirides, it also factored into the production of a few voodoo-themed zombie films which I discuss in a separate section. The alignment of industrial events in the mid-1950s tempered a material auspice wherein both major and minor studios desired the same sort of film, cheap science fiction films and both responded to the opportunity space in similar ways.

Because of the popularity of weirdies across the filmmaking industries, the science fiction zombie films which built off the trend show only a slight distributive preference toward independents, though nearly all originate from low-budget producers. Richard Gordon's DVD commentary for *First Man Into Space* provides testimony as to how low-budget filmmakers produced weirdies hoping to sell them to major distributors where they could maximize their chances of making money. According to Gordon (Weaver and Gordon 2006) for *First Man Into Space* he employed an all-American cast of actors (the film was produced in Britain), set his film in the United States, and attempted to cash-in on a topic of current interest in order to land a distribution deal with a Hollywood major. *First Man Into Space* was distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, but even absent studio backing the popularity of weirides virtually assured that Gordon's film could turn a profit. *Rocketship X-M,* one of the films to launch the cycle, for instance, earned impressive profits despite being released by Lippert Pictures, an exceptionally small independent distributor. Weirdies without studio deals could easily enhance their chances through gimmickry or other promotional tactics designed to attract audiences into theatres (*Variety* 1957e), making films like *First Man Into Space* relatively safe investments.

The temporal auspice of production provided a fecund imaginative base as events of the day provided inspirational material for weirdies (O'Donnell 2003, Weaver and Gordon 2006). The coterminous presence of a material auspice of production predicated on the creation of low to moderately budgeted films frequently zeroing in on the zeitgeist happened to produce several pictures featuring "zombie-like" antagonists. Here Rick Altman's (1999: 30-48) concept of the producer's game discussed in chapter 2 is useful.

On one hand, production personnel chivied an emerging and salable new production trend, distilling aspects deemed commercially and strategically viable for projects they were pursuing at the time. On the other, critics, responding to a batch of cheap science fiction films, analyzed them in a non-systematic fashion and occasionally witnessed zombies in them. For instance, *Variety*'s (1955: 3) review of *Creature with the Atom Brain* called character Dr. Wilhelm Steigg (Gregory Gay) "the mad master of the atomic zombies." *Los Angeles Times* (1956: B5) described the climax of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* "[w]hen McCarthy discovers the reason for everyone's change, he tries to get away and warn the rest of the world. Unfortunately, everyone wants him to join the *zombie* party and become one of them" (emphasis added). In *Monstrosity, Variety* (1964: 6) dismissively noted that Dr. Otto Frank's (Frank Gerstle) "experiments fail to produce anything but zombies, and it's difficult to distinguish the zombies from the other actors." Though the reviews minimally impacted subsequent producers, they indicated ideas of zombies were changing and slowly merging with new modes of production, but contra Altman's (1999) suggestion this did not create a new subgenre of horror monster. Building on ideas of zombies changing for the moment, evidence from political commentary of the fifties suggests that zombies were transforming into a synonym for individuals, social structures, or institutions lacking free will, critical thought, or rationally purposive volition. C.L. Sulzberger (1951, 1952, 1953) a lead foreign correspondent for the *New York Times* sometimes called communist governments and individuals zombies. Due the fledgling sales, Communist Party USA's the *Daily Worker* was referred to as a zombie paper by *Time* (1958). Journalist Leo Egan (1957: 1) accused congressional republications of trying to create a "zombie session" through their

disruption tactics. Bess Furman (1953: 9) criticized the zombifying effects of McCarthyism. As these admittedly brief examples demonstrate, zombies were detaching from their original referent, but pivotal germinal qualities such as loss of self-control, muted emotional functioning, and the general effacement of one's former identity remained.

Mounting flexibility of the zombie idea and its shifting cultural usage started ratcheting zombies in directions that would reconstitute zombies and zombie films. Even though material and temporal auspices of production played vital roles, much of the change was endogenous to zombies themselves. Paraphrasing Stanley Lieberson (2000: 114-116), Leger Grindon (2007, 2012), and Steve Neale (2012) newer genre forms build on existing genre forms, and older generic aspects are eventually replaced. The science fiction "zombie" films, despite not specifically utilizing zombies, do not stray wildly from previous zombie films. Basic ideas animating zombies remain, but have been peppered with other details (e.g. radiation). The incidental recalibration of zombies was not reflexive as in the studios' "zombie films," but a free-for-all style restyling with the mantra "it pays to be 'weird'" (*Variety* 1957e: 3). The endogenous ratcheting of zombies, however, points to power of outside appraisers as their ideas began driving the material relations of production. More than just reviewers constructing a genre by noticing familiar features in a set of films, critic's ideas and social uses of "zombie," now according to Peter Dendle (2001: 4-5) and others in a protean phase, would be taken up by a handful of cultural entrepreneurs. Shifting ideas of zombies allowed many to see zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* (discussed next chapter) and for *Astro Zombies*

(1968) to sell itself as a zombie film – wherein zombies have their brains wiped clean, reenergized, and their bodies controlled remotely (discussed in chapter 8).

Scholars and popular writers remember *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Invisible Invaders, and The Last Man on Earth* as bearing strong affinities with *Night of the Living Dead*, but they mistake the nature of the influence. It is because those films were recognized as zombie films that *Night of the Living Dead* was also recognized as a zombie film and a not ghoul film. The films discussed in this section are part of the missing link in the evolutional transition from Caribbean monster to flesheating ghoul. David Skal (2001: 259) explains why many weirdie sci-fi films were easily mistaken for zombie films: "[a] striking characteristic of fifties horror is its ambivalence about the good life, and the tenuous nature of material security and social identity. In film after film, *people have their personalities stolen*, are trapped inside or driven screaming from their flimsy homes, so easily demolished by monsters or other forces. Military readiness reassures, but it also threatens total destruction at any moment" (emphasis added). While the producers of science fiction zombie films responded more to market indicators on the salability of unusual material than direct interest in zombies, other producers and filmmakers intentionally embraced zombies and took them in different directions. In the next section, I consider how and why producers placed zombies in teenage or youth-oriented films.

6.4 "Young Pawns Thrust Into Pulsating Cages of Horror in a Sadistic Experiment!": The Teenpic Zombie Film

As cinema audiences shrunk, market researchers noticed the primary audiences for films were middle-class teenagers (Doherty 2002: 13-31; *Motion Picture Herald*

1956, 1957b; Shary 2012: 584-586, 588; Weaver 1957). *Motion Picture Herald* (1957b) described the "typical frequent movie-goer" as "a teenager, in high school, who comes from a family that is financially well off, and perhaps which intends to send him (or her) to college." During the 1950s teenagers became a significant consumer group that "was carefully nurtured and vigorously reinforced by the adult institutions around them" (Doherty 2002: 35) with the filmmaking industries "intensifying the narrative range of youth films through placing teenage characters in previously established genres with more dramatic impact" (Shary 2012: 588). Amanda Ann Klein (2011: 60-99), Timothy Shary (2012: 583-584), and Tim Snelson (2013) document the existence of teenpics prior to the 1950s, but *Rock Around the Clock* (1956) provided the extra-industrial event that cemented the marketability of motion pictures catered to youthful patrons at the expense of other age groups in the eyes of Hollywood insiders (Neale 2007b: 368). *Variety* (1956c) discussed the influence of *Rock Around the Clock*, "[f]ollowing up its successful *Rock Around the Clock*, which is expected to gross eight times its negative cost in the world market, Columbia now has *Don't Knock the Rock* and *Cha-Cha-Cha Boom*. At 20th [Century-Fox], *Love Me Tender* is being followed with a semi-rock 'n' roller, *The Girl Can't Help It*." Because of the profitability of catering to teenage audiences and teenagers' reported preference for musicals (*Motion Picture Herald* 1956), filmmakers panning the teenpic market routinely experimented with new music types (e.g. calypso, Jazz, rock) in their teenpics (Stanfield 2010). After AIP established horror teenpics as viable projects (Scheuer 1958), entrepreneurs pursuing both trends figured combining music and horror could enhance the profitability of their films which would mean that

music as a central set piece surfaced in teenpic horror films (cf. Stanfield 2010: 442-443) including some teenpic zombie films.

Teenage preference for attending double bills (*Motion Picture Herald* 1956) and the spread of drive-in theaters galvanized the material foundations for low-budget teenpics of all types (Davis 2012: 67-102, Tzioumakis 2006: 143), transforming the way many companies produced films and germinated exploitation practices targeted to youthful consumers. AIP became the trendsetter in these films (Davis 2012: 103-106, Doherty 2002: 125-131) and produced a number of horror films in the process (Scheuer 1958, Weaver 1957). According to Thomas Doherty (2002: 7) production strategies behind teenpics contained three elements, "(1) controversial, bizarre, or timely subject matter amendable to wild promotion (exploitation potential in its original sense); (2) a substandard budget; and (3) a teenage audience;" I argue that sometimes this included zombie films. William Weaver (1957: 20) explained AIP's production strategies as "provid[ing] satisfactory screen material for the teen-age audience without estranging their elders or their elders," however, "[i]t must not, ever, under any conditions, seem to have been especially chosen for them, conditioned for their years, or equipped with special messages." Major studios employed functionaries like Sam Katzman and Albert Zugsmith to produce low-budget teenpics, but the intra-industrial orientations of the majors preferred blockbusters (Hall and Neale 2010: 135-158, Lev 2003, Schatz 1993) and left the trend of teen-based film productions mostly to independents (Doherty 2002). Given the ephemerality of teenpics (see Flynn and McCarthy 1975: 34-37, Stanfield 2010), the flexibility of smaller independent studios served as an advantage when scanning for exploitation material pivotal to the genre (cf. Crane 1997, Peterson and

Anand 2004: 316). The juvenilization of film audiences and the acute demand of exhibitors for films appealing to teenagers opened an opportunity space to exploit and translated into a rush of teenpics emanating from mostly low-budget independent filmmakers (Davis 2012: 62, Doherty 2002, Neale 2007b, Stanfield 2010). As Jerry Warren, director of *Teenage Zombies* admitted "I just put together a picture that was long enough to play the lower of my double bill … The budget was so low that it was preposterous. … It was one tenth of the lowest possible budget you could think of! I made it so cheap that it was really ridiculous (qtd. in Davis 2012: 195-196). Cheap budgets and shoddy aesthetics, however, belie the shrewdness of many teenpic producers. Their simultaneous exploitation of film trends and cultural ephemera, "result[ed] [in a] mix of mainstream and independent productions, practices and genres, and of adult and teenage components and points of appeal" (Neale 2007b: 368). Teenpic horror films were one teenpic cycle among many which aimed at capitalizing on the popularity of horror and science fiction with teenage audiences in mind. AIP produced the most well-known teenpic horror films including: *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), *The She Creature* (1956), *It Conquered the World* (1956), *The Day the World Ended* (1955), *The Cat Girl* (1957), *Invasion of the Saucer Men*, and *Blood of Dracula* (1957) among others, but for reasons known only to AIP executives zombies remain absent.

Fortunately for zombies, the production practices of AIP influenced other producers who chose to bring zombies into their films. The years between 1959 and 1965 saw the production of five teenpic zombie films: *Teenage Zombies*, *Cape Canaveral Monsters* (1960), *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed Up Zombies* (*Incredible Strange Creatures*) (1964), *The Horror of Party Beach*

(1964), and *Orgy of the Dead* (1965). To reiterate, in contrast to the science fiction zombie films, these films conscientiously deploy zombies in their storylines, only *Cape Canaveral Monsters* downplays the presence of zombies. The budgets of each teenpic zombie film leaves little desire with none carrying the imprimatur of a major studio and none associated with recognizable low-budget producers or production companies like AIP, Hammer, Roger Corman, or William Castle. Most of the teenpic zombie films received scant attention from industry observers. In his DVD commentary Ray Dennis Steckler, the director of *Incredibly Strange Creatures,* joked that he used a large title to get attention and compensate for his small budget (reported as no more than $38,000) (Steckler 2004). By comparison, *Cape Canaveral Monsters*' only press attention was when actors in the film sued its producers for back pay (*Variety* 1961).

The spread of zombie teenpics was mitigated by the successes of other horror trends at the time. AIP, who specialized in teenpics in general, pursued the juvenilization of Gothic goosefleshers (Scheuer 1958) and British production company Hammer updated Gothic monsters for adult audiences (Buchwald 1956, *Hollywood Reporter* 1957). However, the influence of weirdies exerted constitutive forces on a number of teenpic horrors (Arneel 1958, Neale 2007b: 368). With all teenpic zombie films released after 1957, producers likely noticed the salability of gimmicks and offbeat storylines, as *Variety* (1957e: 3) observed "[t]he road to riches is paved with gimmicks." Absurdity became a badge of honor and a point of sale. Zombies were part of the romp, and though not downplayed, zombies did not serve as the centerpiece of these films. Zombies were extra gimmick to sell an extra ticket. *Teenage Zombies* came replete with a zombie gorilla and ran on the tagline, "Young Pawns Thrust Into Pulsating Cages of Horror in a

Sadistic Experiment!" In select areas, *Incredibly Strange Creatures* traded on Hallucinogenic Hypnovision, a gimmick wherein theater employees donned monster masks and ran into the audience for cheap screams. *Incredibly Strange Creatures* also billed itself as the first monster musical a claim also made by *The Horror of Party Beach*, "The First Horror Monster Musical." *Orgy of the Dead* also heavily relied on musical numbers, but in contrast to other youth-oriented zombie films, played to softcore pornography markets. Zombie teenpics played on bizarre and/or timely material moldable to over-the-top promotional tactics, had exceptionally low budgets, and were designed with teenagers or youthful patrons in mind as Thomas Doherty (2002) observed of other teenpics. Promotional tactics of the sort listed above became commonplace for films directed at younger audiences (*Motion Picture Herald* 1957, 1959, 1961).

The temporary material auspice of production for teenpics, however, provided little insurance against failure, causing many producers to spread risk by producing films that mixed a variety of topics in the hopes of attracting a large enough audience to make money (Altman 1999; Austin 2002; Stanfield 2010, 2013). In part to increase their appeal, all the zombie teenpics incorporate elements of teen culture (e.g. romance, rebellion, music, partying, driving) and other teenpic cycles. For instance, with the exception of *Orgy of the Dead*, each employs iconography associated with the beach party film cycle which according to Jim Morton (1985a: 146-147) and Gary Morris (1993) emerged in the late-1950s continuing to the late-1960s and appealed to teenagers more interested in "one last fling" before adulthood than flat-out rebellion against authority. The teenage protagonists in *Teenage Zombies, Cape Canaveral Monsters,* and *The Horror of Party Beach* are carefree wholesome teenagers more interested in enjoying

the moment than anything else. Their Pollyannaish world is returned at the conclusion of the films and they reorient their lives around their former fancies. *Incredibly Strange Creatures*, by contrast, traffics in teen angst with Ray Dennis Steckler admitting adulation for James Dean (Steckler 2004). *Orgy of the Dead* presents a series of zombie striptease routines performed for the pleasure of the Emperor of the Dead (Creswell), leaving little to analyze.

Youth-oriented horror films remain a staple of the filmmaking industries, continually intersecting with broader cultural and industrial trends (Nowell 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2012b; Wee 2006). Early entries in teenpic horrors, which included some zombie films, deeply intersected dominant production trends with producers and filmmakers from the 1950s and 1960s juvenilizing virtually every popular genre (Doherty 2002, Neale 2007b). The sudden popularity of weirdies and industry-wide confidence in them influenced nonaffiliated filmmakers to use zombies in their take on the trend (*Variety* 1956a, 1956b, 1957c, 1957e). By 1965, however, AIP's vice president Samuel Arkhoff announced the curtailment of teen-oriented production, noting the genre had played itself out (*Variety* 1965). One year later, Roger Corman also announced a change of plans, feeling teenpics were no longer viable (Canby 1966). Thomas Doherty (2002: 187-212) notes that teenpics continued production, but not with the same numeric veracity. Similar to the dissolution of car chase films (Romao 2003) and slasher films (Kapsis 2009), the fall of teenpic horrors did not result from box-office failures, but from producers' perception that the genre had run its course. The intentional use of zombies in some of these films, importantly, altered what a zombie could be. Filmmakers did not have respect to nonexistent zombie traditions, they could call their monsters zombies and

get away with it. The protean impreciseness of zombies allowed for it. Unlike *Valley of the Zombies* (1946), no one questioned the zombieness of teenpic zombies despite the fact that voodoo-themed zombie films were still being produced.

6.5 "Terrors on the African Voodoo Coast": Voodoo's Last Hoorah

Tepid box-office performance slowed the production of voodoo-themed films in the immediate post-studio-era to a trickle with only *Voodoo Tiger* (1952) seeing the light of day. *Voodoo Tiger* is the mid-point of the Jungle Jim series that featured former Tarzan actor and Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller. With formal occupation of the Caribbean long-over and the awes of science and Cold War paranoia occupying the American mind, the temporal auspices of production did not favor the continuation of voodoo-themed zombie films. Despite the constraining conditions, four voodoo-laced zombie films appeared between the years between 1957 and 1967: *Voodoo Island* (1957), *The Zombies of Mora Tau* (1957), *Blood of the Zombie* (1961), and *I Eat Your Skin* (1964). The films demonstrate an interesting bifurcation in that the two voodoo-themed zombie released in 1957 were distributed by major studios at the height of the weirdie craze, where the two independently produced and released voodoo-themed zombie films were produced in the 1960s (*I Eat You Skin* was not released until 1971). With offbeat science fiction and horror topics performing well in the box office, it is no surprise that "old monsters" should be dusted off for another run/chance at stardom. Posters and advertising for *Voodoo Island* and *The Zombies of Mora Tau* relied on the same ballyhoo stunts as weirdies. In *Voodoo Island* skeptical Phillip Knight (Boris Karloff) tries to debunk claims that a South Pacific Island – which is to become a resort hotel resort – is cursed. Though zombies are prominent in *Voodoo Island*, they take a backseat to

carnivorous plants with the poster announcing, "The Weird Jungle of Cobra Plants that Feed on Women – and Rip Men Apart." *Variety* (1957b: 6) struggled to make sense of the plot, "[t]here's no attempt at explaining how various mysterious things happen in the Richard Landau script; probably because there is no way to do it logically, but the thriller gimmicks come off with the desired impact under Reginald LeBorg's direction." *Zombies of Mora Tau*'s twist on voodoo zombies transplanted zombification to the African coast and came replete with the tagline "Terror on the African Voodoo Coast!" *Film Daily*'s review (1957: 10) captured the weirdie aspects of *Zombies of Mora Tau*, "[z]ombies and adventurers clash in a struggle for a fortune in diamonds at the bottom of the sea in this Sam Katzman production." *Los Angeles Times* (1957: A13) reported on the film's updating of the zombie tale, "those dull-eyed strollers you may remember from yore are up to date as 1957 this time. They may lumber ashore but wait 'til you see them in action underwater." In this sense both *Voodoo Island* and *Zombies of Mora Tau* can be explained by the quick and massive spread of low-budget "chiller-diller" movies, but what of *Blood of the Zombie* and *I Eat Your Skin*? I contend both can be understood by focusing on general processes rather than pointing to their peculiarities; and they can also be explained as part of the weirdie trend.

The career arc of *Blood of Zombie*'s writer, director, and producer, Barry Mahon traversed through the contours of low-budget productions. Mahon started in the early 1960s with exploitation weirdies like *Violent Women* (1960), *Morals Squad* (1960), and *Blood of the Zombie* before transitioning to softcore pornography in *Nudes Inc.* (1965), *Naughty Nudes* (1965), *Nudes on Tiger Reef* (1965) and occasionally attempted children's pictures such as *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1970) and *The Wonderful Land of Oz*

(1970). Mahon's career progression is similar to Ed Wood as described by Robert Birchard (1995), neither man was unique, they were two "of many toiling in rather fruitless fields" (450) with filmographies roughly grafting onto the flow of extremely low-budget filmmaking. Filmed back-to-back with *The Horror of Party Beach* by producer Del Tenney, *I Eat Your Skin* could easily pass for a teenpic horror film were it not for the use of voodoo. In *I Eat Your Skin*'s narrative, Tom Harris (William Joyce) a doting, womanizing playboy is lured to a "voodoo island" under the pretense that he may hook-up with an attractive native girl.

None of the four voodoo-themed zombie films achieved a high-level of success. Their appearance derived less from a specific interest in reuniting zombies with their xenophobic past and more from a brief pocket of industrial activity that thrived on exploiting the unusual; and in a white supremacist country what would be more unusual than the spiritual practices of Afro-Caribbean people turning people into a catatonic shell of their former selves? As zombies evolved through material structures of filmmaking, xenophobia of this sort lost its appeal as lagging box offices indicated to producers that there was no longer salable interest in the material. By necessity then, zombies became less and less associated voodoo and more associated with our neighbors which sold more tickets. Voodoo zombies crop up occasionally as in *Serpent and the Rainbow* (1987) and *Working Stiffs* (1989) because they part of the palette from which the monster can be concocted (cf. Grindon 2012: 55-57), but this cycle of four voodoo-centric zombie films would be the last hoorah for this iteration of the genre. In the words of Jamie Russell (2006: 49), "the zombie movie in particular had out-grown the voodoo-focused films of the 1930s and 1940s."

6.6 “Hollywood is Higher ’n’ Ever on Zombies”: The “Radical” Ecological Transformation of Zombies

Exiting the studio-era, the future of zombie films was uncertain. Twists of fate, however, altered ideas of zombies and with it transformed films utilizing them. “Zombies” did not just enter the cultural lexicon of reporters, they crept into the panels of comic books, most infamously EC Comics which commonly portrayed the monsters as putridly decaying corpses. In the trade of the filmmaking industries “zombies” became a stand-in term for unusual horror with Gene Arneel (1958: 7) writing “Hollywood is higher ’n’ ever on zombies. The offbeat horror fare is drawing the attention of more producers for the reason that a few entries in this category have drawn unusual business in relation to costs.” In the process zombies seamlessly changed their stripes, but why was such a change allowed? Because zombies lacked clear ecological boundaries from their inception, zombies’ ecological boundaries were particularly porous and susceptible to inconsistencies in recognition, the currents of exogenous social processes and endogenous industrial conditions of production. Authors like Peter Dendle (2001: 4-5), Bruce Kawin (2012: 118-125), and Jamie Russell (2006: 47-54) observe zombies transformed between the 1940s and *Night of the Living Dead* with filmmakers trans enormous liberties with them. No longer interested in the former signified, cultural entrepreneurs deployed the signifier in new and different ways. Though I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that zombies metamorphosed drastically, the transition was witnessed as gradual. Brooks Atkinson’s (1932: 17) pre-*White Zombie* understanding zombie which was not beholden to voodoo or the Caribbean, defined an entity lacking human emotions and traversing through life with muted vitality. Atkinson’s definition of

zombies can be easily transplanted to the fears of stolen identity and conformity that animated many weirdie films. Zombies' metonymical representation of Cold War hyperbole of threatened individuality from within and without constitutes an "incremental replacement mechanism" (Lieberson 2000: 114-116) insofar as former aspects of the monster (e.g. zombies association with Othered cultures) and new ones were entered in (e.g. zombies increasing association with US citizens). Well before Romero vanquished the chains of a master (Dendle 2001: 6), the films discussed in this chapter depicted masterless zombies.

One of the more interesting zombie films from this cycle is *The Last Man on Earth*, a film that nearly everyone recognizes as a vampire film today, but was nonetheless identified as containing zombies by Howard Thompson (1964: 24) of the *New York Times*, "Vincent Price [is] stumping around an earthly wasteland and tangling with a gang of zombies, most of whom he skewers." Even though *The Last Man on Earth* bears striking similarity to *Night of the Living Dead*, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, the novel on which both films are based, clearly envisions the entities as more vampiric with protagonist Robert Neville slaying the monsters with wooden stakes. Part of the reason some were able to see zombies in *The Last Man on Earth* is the time between the novel and the film and discursive evolution of both the zombie and vampire idea between them. With the suave Christopher Lee taking up Dracula's cape in Hammer's update to the vampire, it made little sense to describe the monsters terrorizing Dr. Robert Morgan (Vincent Price) in *The Last Man on Earth* as zombies. Peter Dendle (2001: 100) describes why the monsters from *The Last Man on Earth* are more zombie than vampire, "these mindless hulks lumber around in tattered and soiled clothes, devoid of emotion

and humanity, repetitively droning a few simple phrases." Also fitting more with vampires than zombies is the film *The Return of Dracula* (1958) which was the only film to fall outside the cycles I identified. Describing Frances Lederer's role as Dracula, *Variety*'s (1958: 3) review proclaimed, "Lederer is not Count Dracula in this one, but is a Dracula-type zombie who sets out to transplant himself from his native Balkins to sunny California." Despite its clear reliance on vampiric tropes in title and content, *The Return of Dracula*'s offbeat rendering of the vampire's tale that was recognized as a zombie demonstrates how varied the zombie idea expanded during the era.

The cycles of zombie films produced during the 1950s and 1960s can be explained through three simple processes highlighted at the beginning of the chapter: 1) short-term production goals, 2) inconsistent labeling practices, and 3) the ratcheting of a loose endogenous genre ecology. Steep declines in audiences influenced the retrenchment of B-film productions and pursuance of blockbuster films. An extra-industrial event, a spate of successful low-budget films, placed industry confidence in offbeat content which combined with an intra-industrial response toward emphasizing gimmicked films to lodge open a new opportunity space for low-end cultural entrepreneurs. The production of modestly budgeted films of unusual decorum that blended aspects of science fiction, current events, social solicitude, and monsters that trespassed into areas analogous to shifting understandings of "zombies" created a cycle of science fiction based zombie films that did not specifically evoke the creature. Moreover, a coterminous industry development was the emergence of teenpics which reshaped nearly all aspects of American culture into ephemeralized cinematic commodities for teenagers. Teenpic producers had similar production logics to weirdie producers, but had an extra filter –

teenage audiences. AIP's horror productions garner the bulk of attention, but it was a group of outsiders who worked in the periphery of the industry often without unionized actors or shooting permits that produced the teenpic zombie films (cf. Martin 2009). Contra science fiction zombie films, teenpic zombie films deliberately use the monster in their attempt to capitalize on the opportunity space of championing wacky, over-the-top, gimmick-laden product. Because zombies were in a moment of imprecise redefinition, the teenpic zombie films passed without questioning the zombieness of their zombies. Because of the strength of the weirdie fad and the apparent salability of unusual topics, voodoo-themed zombie resurfaced momentarily. The marginal performance of *Voodoo Island* and *Zombies of Mora Tau*, however, indicated to filmmakers and producers that market interest in voodoo-zombie movies had evaporated. The collapse of voodoo-themed zombie films occurred as new material auspices and the zeitgeist favored new reconstitutions of the monster which is why changes to zombies in the 1950s and 1960s did not create an entirely new genre.

6.7 Conclusion

Zombies entered the immediate post-studio era of filmmaking as an afterthought. Stripped of the institutional foundations that led to a cycle of zombie-centered films from Poverty Row, the term still encumbered imaginative fascinations, but former ideas of it did not transition into the auspicial milieus of production. Carrying a wide endogenous genre ecology, the zombie idea was applied to a selection of science fiction films involving the loss of identity or brainwashing of individuals. Though detached from voodoo, these depictions are faithful to core aspects of the zombie idea (i.e. a human lacking emotion and no longer in control of itself) and would prove foundational to its

restructuring later on. New ideas of zombies confronted older ideas. Voodoo-themed zombie films took further liberties than the original voodoo-themed zombie films, but both still relied on tropes of black mysticism and superstition. Ticket sales favored the production of more "new zombies" found in films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Last Man on Earth*. The immediate post-studio era covered in this chapter concluded with Gulf + Western's buyout of Paramount in 1966, sparking a trend of conglomeration for nearly all the major studios. Buyouts helped stabilize studio finances and set Hollywood on a blockbuster blitz that continues to this day (Cook 2000: 25-26, King 2002: 66-75). Zombies, however, were about to change a little more. The next chapter focuses on the production, reception, and legacy of *Night of the Living Dead*. Contrary to most scholarship, I argue the film was not a radical departure from the zombie films discussed in this chapter, but can be understood as an extension of them with a violent and sociopoliticized twist.

Chapter 7 : "It Was 1968, Man. Everybody Had a 'Message'": Making *Night of the Living Dead*, Remaking Zombie Cinema

7.1 Introduction: Night of the Living Dead, a Weirdie?

Despite not mentioning zombies in script or advertising, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (referred to hereafter as *Night*) is considered the granddaddy of the modern zombie film. In *Night*'s script, the monstrous antagonists are called "ghouls," while characters in *Night* use more nebulous terms like "those things." Most people are aware of these points, but few hash out how a film that was neither conceived nor marketed as a zombie film became synonymous with the monster. Last chapter I argued new ideas of zombies intersected with new modes of production to initiate the dawn of a new dead. Zombies became subsumed in a cluster of films known as weirdies, unusual low- to moderate-budget monster-based science fiction horror films. In this chapter I argue that *Night* is both a legacy of and departure from weirdie cinema. *Night*'s affinities with prior weirdies as noted by several critics (see Beck 1972, Pelegrine 1968, Vellela 1968) with *Variety* explicitly using the term to describe it (*Variety* 1969a) and allowed it to be seen as a zombie film almost immediately (*Variety* 1968c). In contrast, *Night*'s discontinuities from other weirdies, its unrepentant violence and bleak social commentary, inseparable from its critical and commercial successes, helped cement a more stable ecological blueprint for zombie cinema (which is discussed in greater detail next detail).

In this chapter I focus only on *Night*, in part because of its canonical status in the recreation of zombie cinema, and, in part, to challenge its extraordinariness by pointing to its ordinariness. However, I also acknowledge *Night*'s uniqueness in the latter part of this chapter insofar as it "started" the recalibration of zombies. While incongruent with most

reflectionist studies of the zombie genre, my analysis is indebted to Kevin Heffernan's (2002, 2004: 214-228) accounts of *Night*'s exhibitions and affinities with 1950s and 1960s science fiction horror films. In contrast to Heffernan, I highlight the mundanity of *Night*'s gestation before analyzing its distribution, critical reception, and eventual legacy. Similar to Heffernan, though, I discuss how *Night* shares more in common with weirdies than is traditionally discussed. Before providing this examination, however, I sketch out important temporal and material auspicial developments in film production as *Night* went in front of the lens.

7.2 Sadism on Sale: The Auspicial Contexts of Late-1960s Film Production

Throughout the 1960s numerous big-budget Hollywood films tanked at the ticket booth (Hall and Neale 2010: 166, King 2002: 34-35). Because of their box office blunders, "the majors became ripe targets for corporate takeovers" (Tzioumakis 2006: 194). Beginning with Paramount which was bought out by Gulf + Western in 1966, other majors were also taken over by conglomerates: United Artists by Transamerica (1967), Warner Bros. by Kinney National Service (1969), and MGM by Kirk Kerkorian (1969) a hotel and finance magnate. Columbia and Twentieth Century-Fox adopted a conglomerate model by diversifying their business ventures before being bought-out themselves in the 1980s. Geoff King (2002: 68) explains the benefits of conglomeration, "it helps to increase stability and minimize risks, especially those associated with the production of expensive blockbusters … a giant corporation with a range of interests has enough resources and flexibility to even out some of the unpredictable ups and downs of the film industry." According to Yannis Tzioumakis (2006: 192-193), conglomeration provided an intra-industrial event that saw major studios double-down on big-budget

event films, leaving gaps for low-end independent to exploit. The influence of the opportunity spaces opened by the studios' apertures during the era of conglomeration are considered next chapter, but for now it is enough to note that the landscape of American cinema was radically transformed in a short period of time (see Balio 1990a, King 2002: 66-75, Tzioumakis 2006: 192-212).

The opportunity space opened by the majors' pursuit of blockbusters with escalating budgets was crucially factored by an extra-industrial event, the sudden appearance and popularity of violent cinema. In an oft-misquoted review of *Night*, Lee Beaupre (1968: 3) complained:

> Until the Supreme Court establishes clear-cut guidelines for the anatomy of violence, *Night of the Living Dead* will serve as an outer-limit definition by example. In a mere 90 minutes, this horror film (pun intended) casts serious aspersions on the integrity and social responsibility of its Pittsburgh-based makers, distrib Walter Reade, the film industry as a whole and exhibs who book the pic, as well as raising doubts about the future of the regional cinema movement and about the moral health of filmgoers who cheerfully opt for this unrelieved orgy of sadism.

Most quote the review to read, "pornography of violence" a phrase that rightfully belongs to historian and social critic Arthur Schlesinger (1968: 53) who wrote "[i]n recent years the movies and television have developed a pornography of violence far more demoralizing than the pornography of sex." Despite the ubiquity of the misattribution, both Beaupre and Schlesinger air a similar grievance that was particularly acute at the release of *Night*. Films were unquestionably becoming more violent and this violence was related just as much to the sociopolitical temperament as to a series of extra- and intra-industrial events (cf. Becker 2006, Prince 2000b). I use the remainder of this section to demonstrate the convergence of these factors in filmic texts.

Scholars routinely point to *Night*'s capture of late-1960s discontent with the Vietnam War, the assassinations of numerous political leaders – particularly Martin Luther King, violence surrounding the struggle for civil rights, and frustrations with the slow deaths of the era's progressive movements as explanation for the film's cult status and violence pessimism (see Becker 2006, Bishop 2010a: 94-128, Higashi 1990, Paffenroth 2006: 27-44, Wood 2003: 101-107). Though lacking manifest political intent, George Romero eventually admitted, "[i]t was 1968, man. Everybody had a message. Maybe it crept in. I was just making a horror film, and I think the anger and the attitude and all that's there is just there because it was 1968" (qtd. in Gagne 1987: 38). While temporal auspice is a large part of *Night*'s story, it cannot explain the emergence of violent cinema alone and producers' motivations for mobilizing violent content in their films, rather the films that made up the violent trend (summarized in Prince 2000b) were made possible by a host of intra-industrial factors nearly two decades in the making. As noted in previous chapters, the Production Code Administration (PCA) maintained the sanctity of the screen during the studio era, effectively prohibiting mainstream distribution and exhibition of controversial or otherwise subversive content. The sustenance of the administration required the collective commitment of the studios which was made easier with their oligopolistic control over the industry (Maltby 1993). With exhibition separated from production and distribution, the majors could no longer enforce the Production Code seal, leaving director Frank Capra to observe "the seal became impotent because the [Motion Picture Association of America] could not control the theater chains. Before, if you did not have a seal, you had to play the honky-tonks. The seal is now castrated" (qtd. in Sanlder 2007: 27). Films testing the limits of the code

flooded screens: *Pinky* (1949), *The Bicycle Thief* (1949), *Stromboli* (1950), *The Miracle* (1950), *The Moon is Blue* (1953), *From Here to Eternity* (1953), *Baby Doll* (1956), *The Bad Seed* (1956), *Peyton Place* (1957), *Some Like It Hot* (1959), *Pillow Talk* (1959), *Lolita* (1962) and many others piqued controversies over the code for varying reasons (for summaries see Casper 2007: 121-155), leading to numerous revisions in the code that irreparably weakened its power. In 1952, the United States Supreme Court gave motion pictures first amendment protection in the *Joseph Burstyn Inc. vs. Wilson* cased. Tino Balio (1990a: 11-13), however, argues the Red Scare conditioned the victory by shying producers away from infusing overt social commentary into their films (see also Neve 2003).

According to Stephen Prince (2000b: 132-133) code revisions made in September 1966 enabled franker cinematic treatment of violence than in years past. Not only was more violence permitted, but the industry's major trade organization the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) defended it. The MPAA proclaimed that the moral guardians decrying cinema's sanguinary turn "fail to realize that films have changed to reflect our changing culture" (*Variety* 1969c: 7). Newly empowered cultural entrepreneurs could use this opportunity space to push cinematic discretion and run to the bank for doing so, and their successes signaled to others that they too could exploit the trend. 1967 proved a watershed year for "hemorrhaging pictures" with *A Fistful of Dollars* (1967), *A Few More Dollars* (1967), *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1967), *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) all hitting box office pay dirt (Prince 2000b). Critics like Robert Landry (1967: 7) linked the popularity of these films to "sadism from start to finish" (see also Crowther 1967, Seidenbaum 1969, Warga

1969). Arthur Penn who directed *Bonnie and Clyde*, defended the violence in his film as demonstrative of the era's socio-politically influenced turmoil (cf. Prince 2000b). Jack Valenti, then president of the MPAA, rationalized ascending cinematic violence by pointing to real-life violence aired on the nightly news, "[f]or the first time in the history of this country, people are exposed to instant coverage of a war in progress. When so many movie critics complain about violence on film, I don't think they realize the impact of 30 minutes on the Huntley-Brinkley newscast – and that's real violence" (qtd. in *Variety* 1968a: 2). Matt Becker (2006) argues two aspects of Hollywood's increasingly brutal cinema infused in the celluloid of *Night*, violent political commentary and box office salability in a convergence Becker calls "hippie horror." According to Becker the pessimism of *Night*, the fact that reassuring closure cannot fold into the dominant ideology, indicates a shift in attitude of the countercultural left; in the midst of social trauma many leftists were losing hope and feeling powerless, *Night*, it is argued, spoke to this sense of nihilism and defeat. However, focusing on the latter of Becker's observations, box office salability, describes how *Night* fit its material auspice of production and is, therefore, crucial to understanding its recognition as a zombie film.

7.3 "What Kind of Film Could You Make on Six Thousand Dollars?": Producing a "Monster Flick"

Night is (in)famous for many things. Focusing only on syntactics for the moment, it reinvented the zombie genre by popularizing the motif of boarding-up a defensible space, imbuing zombies with a ravenous appetite for the living, giving zombies a slow uncoordinated gait, and promoting the idea that zombies can be dispatched with a gun blast to the head. It may, then, come as surprise to note that none of this was intentional;

and most if it was not original. The mundane origin and execution of the film, often treated heroically in scholarship, is pivotal to understanding how the ecology of zombies as altered by the era of the weirdie turned a ghoulish film into the penultimate zombie film. *Night*'s aesthetic and commercial logic, I argue, are crucial links it shares with weirdies as I demonstrate in this section.

When the embittered crew behind *Night* gathered for their faithful meeting in a small Pittsburgh restaurant, they had tasted defeat before. Previous projects like *Expostulations* and *Whine of Fawn* failed to gain traction (Becker 2006: 45-46, Russo 1985: 23-27). The idea for a monster film was purely pragmatic and driven by the young filmmakers' perception on the type of film they could earn money on (Gagne 1987: 21, Hervey 2008: 9-13, Kane 2010: 20-22, Russo 1985: 15, Surmacz 1975). Barely eking by making local television commercials, the small groups of friends resolved to make a film, but they had little funds. They agreed to have ten people commit $600 each to effort, forming the Image Ten which named for the first ten investors. John Russo's (1985: 15) account of the meeting sees Richard Ricci exclaiming, "[w]hat kind of film could you make on six thousand dollars? Christ – it costs more than that to make a beer commercial." Russo suggested a horror film because as Karl Hardman – co-producer and actor *Night* – relayed in a roundtable discussion "I think we all agreed it would be the most commercial film we could produce" (qtd. in Surmacz 1975: 15). Russo (1985: 15) recalls noting, "[w]e ought to be able to make something more legitimately terrifying than these things about giant praying mantises or creatures in rubber masks." At the time, producing low-rent horror flicks remained one of few and most economically dependable opportunity spaces for aspiring filmmakers to ply their craft (Konow 2012: 91-125). The

"Monster Flick" as *Night*'s producers initially called the film, was solely meant to wet the feet of aspiring filmmakers destined for more. Russ Streiner – co-producer and actor – volunteered, "deep down inside we were all serious filmmakers and somewhat disappointed because we had to resort to horror for our first film (qtd. in Surmacz 1975: 16). Weirdies already crested their peak, but offbeat horror films like *Night* were still salable to distributors during the usually slow Halloween season (Heffernan 2002). Many ideas from *Night* obliquely derive from previous weirdies. Gagne (1987: 23) explains the scripted pages, which were later scrapped, as "a teenagers-from-outer-space/flying saucer spoof." According to Russo, "I started it out with two ghouls in a cemetery carrying something. The ghouls are frightened by a spacecraft streaking across the sky, and they remove the rubber masks to reveal that they're really two kids with a stolen case of beer. *Our problem was that, on the cash we had, how could we pull off the special effects*?" (emphasis added) (qtd. in Gagne 1987: 23). Romero took the idea of starting the film in the cemetery and scripted forty pages of what eventually became *Night*. Romero's partially finished script was on an unpublished short story Romero had written years earlier which was based on Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend.*

Kevin Heffernan (2002: 66, 2004: 215) argues the marginal place of *Night*'s creators in the film industry influenced them to differentiate their "monster flick" by emphasizing violence because of its apparent popularity at the box office and imbuing *Night* with a shock ending. As Streiner noted, "[w]e decided once we reconciled ourselves to that premise [flesh eating ghouls] then why sell it out? If we presume that recently dead were coming back to life, would maim and otherwise devour victims, then

let's show it off" (qtd. in Surmacz 1975: 16). Russo spoke of attempts to distinguish *Night* from formulaic weirdies of its ilk,

> We did a lot of talking about how to pay off the kind of people that like horror films. What do they like to see? There were a lot of movies out, for instance, that would spend 15 minutes talking about a gigantic flying mantis that was killing people. In the first 15 minutes of the movie people would be driving around in cars and every once in a whole you'd catch a glimpse of the monster behind the bush. Finally someone would get. Then another 15 minutes of a scientist in a laboratory trying to figure out what caused this gigantic thing. Then, at the end, the National Guard would come in and throw the flames on it and burn it. Our movie was not going to be like this. Whatever the terror is in the film, we said, there's going to be plenty of it. If it's a ghoul, then you'll have plenty of ghouls and there's going to be real danger (qtd. in Surmacz 1975: 16-17).

Despite the eschewal of formulaic weirdies, however, *Night* bears many similarities to them as Heffernan (2002) also points out. As mentioned earlier, *Night*'s first link with the weirdie lies in its source material, a 1950s novel presenting an end of the world scenario replete with a horde of feckless hematophagic "vampires" marauding the last uninfected human in his boarded up house. The novel, as discussed last chapter, was adapted into *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), a film specifically recognized as both a weirdie and a zombie film and which also bears strong resemblance to *Night*. In logging their similarities, both *The Last Man on Earth* and *Night* present their monstrous antagonists as weak, dangerous only in great numbers, and sullen in appearance to name a few. A key point of tension in both films is the repeated broaching of a fortified abode with arms of anonymous "zombies" blindly grasping through boarded-up broken window panes. The death of Dr. Morgan (Vincent Price) as a mistaken monster in *The Last Man on Earth* presages the shocking death of Ben (Duane Jones) who was mistaken by an all-white posse in *Night*; albeit *Night*'s shock ending had more sociopolitical resonance for obvious reasons. The apocalyptic aura evinced by *Night* was also a key component to many

weirdie films which were discussed last chapter, namely the notion that society would collapse not from the monsters without, but the monsters within. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *Invisible Invaders* (1959) show zombies as middle class white Americans spreading their morbid Midas touch whereas the zombies in *Night* appear of more modest social class origins with better sex representation. However, *Night* adds a component from other weirdies, distressed saviors struggling to live in a suddenly world antagonistic to patriarchal authority (Dillard 1987, Wood 2004). In this narrative content, as Kevin Heffernan points out, *Night* parallels films like *The Day the World Ended* (1956) and *Panic in Year Zero* (1962), but as I argue, also *Invisible Invaders.*

In *The Day the World Ended* a radiation saturated Earth turns those who manage to live through it into literal monsters. Meanwhile, a group of survivors who managed to elude the radiation's reach hole-up in a mountain shelter as they wait for safe living conditions to reemerge. *Invisible Invaders* offers a similar narrative where several scientists and military personnel hide in a bomb shelter carved into the side of a mountain which happens to be complete with lab equipment. In contrast, *Panic in Year Zero* does not contain any monsters at all, but revolves around a father scrupulously protecting his family as they seek sanctuary from an all-out atomic attack on Los Angeles. The actions of Harry Baldwin (Ray Milland) in *Panic in Year Zero* mimic the actions of Harry Cooper (Karl Hardman) in *Night*, but Kevin Heffernan (2002: 70) notes, "[*Panic in Year Zero*] ends with normality and faith in authority restored as the escort departs down the lonely highway. *Night of the Living Dead* reverses the terms of this climax and resolution 180 degrees." Heffernan (2002, 2004) describes the similarities *Night* shared with other science fiction and horror films to explain why it was indiscriminately exhibited in

children's matinees despite its violence. I have taken this set of observations in a different direction, to show its direct lineage to other weirdies. It is because of these similarties that *Night* could be recognized as a zombie film.

At the heart of *Night*'s textual affinities with other weirdies lies a molding material logic that endowed *Night* with weirdie sentiment. To reconsider its commercial impetus, the cause of the zombie outbreak in *Night* is left anomalous, it does, however, offer one suggestion; radition from an exploded Venus probe reentering Earth's atmosphere, an angle that sparked heated behind-the-scenes debate with many in the crew desiring no explanation at all (see Surmacz 1975). John Russo divulges the rationale for the Venus probe explanation, "at the time almost every film we went to see in that genre had an explanation. It seemed that the masses couldn't live without some sort of explanation. We finally decided to give them one, even though we would have rather had various explanations attempted on the television, on the radio, by scientists, maybe religious fanatics, or whatever" (qtd. in Surmacz 1975: 16). Karl Hardman added, "[i]t was safer to explain it. That was the only conclusion" (qtd. in Surmacz 1975: 16). Thus, even though the filmmakers wanted to make a nonconformist film they did not stray too far from acceptable generic ecological boundaries. In a 1973 interview George Romero would recall, "[w]hen we made *Night of the Living Dead*, we made it as our first picture and our friends in distribution circles told us to make something exploitative because it's safer. So we decided to do a 'horror film.' Now when we did it, we said, we're not just going to do a horror film, we're going to really 'go out' with it and try and make it 'gutsy'" (qtd. in Williams 2011: 19). Russo put it more bluntly, "I think the film is an attempt to make money" (qtd. in Surmacz 1975: 16). This material commercial interest in

investing in one of the few outlets available to low-budget filmmakers and pseudo cavalier attitude of bucking hackneyed formulae would eventually help alter the zombie ecology, but the effort was almost for naught as the film encountered distribution problems.

7.4 "I Felt Real Terror in that Neighborhood Theater": Distribution and Exhibition of *Night*

Principle filming for *Night* occurred mostly on weekends and spanned nine months. Shooting days were grueling, often lasting twenty-four hours with some even sleeping in a farmhouse which lacked electricity and plumbing and also served as *Night*'s primary set piece. As the film slowly came together, George Romero did all the editing, "work[ing] himself into near total exhaustion" (Russo 1985: 83). Despite the care taken to create a moneymaking film, *Night* did not have a distributor. Convinced they had something special George Romero and Russ Streiner drove a finished copy of the film to New York. When finding a distributor, the legacy of weirdies loomed large as every potential studio rejected *Night* on the lines that it was the sort of film American International Pictures would release. In other words, industry gatekeepers no longer had the confidence in weirdie cinema that they did a few years ago. Moreover, conglomerated studios shirked obscure little pictures as they were about to enter a period of retrenchment (Balio 1990a, Cook 2000: 9-14, Tzioumakis 2006: 192-212). To add salt to the wounds of Romero and Streiner, American International Pictures rejected *Night* on account that they already had a full slate of films for the fiscal year (Russo 1985: 87).[9]

[9] This is according to Russo's account of *Night*'s production. Some claim that American International Pictures was willing to accept the film under the pre-condition that Ben would live, but Romero stood steadfast. I cannot find a primary source to verify this particular story.

After failing to find a distributor, Romero and Streiner enlisted the services of producer's representative Budd Rogers who managed to secure five distribution offers from small independent companies. Romero and crew, under the name Image Ten – named after the initial ten investors to provide seed money to *Night* – signed a deal with Continental a branch of the Walter Reade Organization. Kevin Heffernan (2002) argues the similarities between *Night* and other 1950s and 1960s films afforded Walter Reade tremendous latitude in distributing the film. *Night* could be shown as a horror matinee and be booked into evening slots. Walter Reade could also place *Night* on double bills with similar weirdies. Importantly, with an African American lead, *Night* could easily be paired with features designed for black audiences like *The Intruder* (1961), *The Cool World* (1963), *Gone are the Days* (1963), and *Nothing but a Man* (1965). Most infamously, because the rating system at the time of *Night*'s release had two categories it was able to play in children's matinees (Heffernan 2002: 73-74). In spite of *Night*'s flexibility and initial box office successes (Russo 1985: 90-105), it failed to live up to Walter Reade's expectation of breaking $1 million (Heffernan 2002, 2004: 214-228) and momentarily faded into obscurity (Hoberman and Rosebaum 1991). With its similarities to prior weirdies *Night* may have skipped through the footnotes of horror history had people not started noticing several key discontinuities during its 1969 rerelease (Beck 1972: 30) upon which it spread via word-of-mouth and "began to accrue an underground reputation among critics and horror buffs" (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 1991: 113).

Ken Hervey (2008: 24-27) argues that even though racial and social strife reached a fever pitch, mainstream Hollywood failed to register it. Buzz generating from *Night* centered on the fact that its black hero was gunned down by an all-white gun-toting

militia. Still reeling from Martin Luther King's assassination – the news of which broke when and Streiner were driving to New York with the film in the trunk of their car – the racial significance of Ben's death in *Night* was palpable and hard not to notice. Racial implications and readings were obvious, but were the filmmakers trying to make a statement? According to Russo, "[t]here's no social comment. It was not 'let's give this black guy a break' or anything else. He just happened to turn up and be the best actor we could cast for the part. The decision was no more complex than that" (qtd. Surmacz 1975: 17). In less polite terms Russo also remarked, "[a] lot of the critics have jumped off the deep end in likening the ghouls to the silent majority and finding all sorts of implications that none of us ever intended. I think George wants to encourage that kind of thinking on the part of some critics. But I'd rather tell they're full of shit" (qtd. in Surmacz 1975: 16). George Romero (qtd. in Russo 1985: 7) echoed this sentiment in the preface to Russo's historiography of the film, "[w]e cast a black man not because he was black, but because we like Duane's audition better than others we had seen … [t]he allegory which is assigned to the film's message was not at all in our minds as we worked." Despite Russo and Romero's feelings, Duane Jones was very astute to the film's potential racial implications, "[i]t was in their innocence and lack of prejudice that I advised George on at least two occasions to reconsider a scene because it would give a racial overtone to the film" (qtd. in Ferrante 1989: 16). Jones reveals he successfully lobbied for death of Ben at the end of *Night*,

> The couple of endings that were alternately being discussed would have read wrong racially. I had said that it would have a wonderful O. Henry ending to have the character killed fortuitously. The heroes never die in American movies. The jolt of that and the double-jolt of the hero figure being black seemed like a double-barreled whammy… I convinced George that the black community would

> rather see me dead than saved, after all that had gone on, in a corny and symbolically confusing way (ibid.).

Moreover, initially written as a gruff trucker with an unsophisticated drawl, the part of Ben was not re-written when Jones landed the part. Jones chose to make drastic changes to the character (Ferrante 1989). Karl Hardman recalled: "Duane simply refused to do the role as it was written. As I recall, I believe that Duane himself upgraded his own dialogue to reflect how he felt the character should present himself" (qtd. in Kane 2010: 33).

In addition to Jones' racial savvy, Walter Reade conscientiously exploited race in its distribution of *Night* by double billing it with *Slaves* (1969), a double bill invited racial comparisons (Heffernan 2002, Hervey 2008: 42-46). Scholar of African American films Donald Bogle (2010: 225) wrote of *Slaves*, "[t]hrough this undercover remake of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, director Biberman hoped to drawn an analogy between the brutal America of the past and the violent America of the 1960s." Additionally, industry observers increasingly saw oblique appeals to African American audiences as potentially lucrative and worthwhile endeavors. *Variety* reporter Lee Beaupre (1967: 3) revealed that African Americans constituted one-third of the cinema-going public and commented that "black power can also mean green power." In addition to appealing to black audiences, Hervey (2008: 45-46) also argues that Ben's race factored into *Night*'s popularity with trendy white audiences. Becker (2006) posits the film resonated with progressive whites in that it tapped into the despair of the moment in offering a critique without solution.

Night also gained a reputation as a grim and disgusting horror film thanks in part to *Reader's Digest* reprint of Robert Ebert's *Chicago Sun-Times* review of the film. Audiences interested in legitimate terror salivated when Roger Ebert (1969: 128) wrote, "I felt real terror in that neighborhood theater. I saw kids who had no sources they could

draw upon to protect themselves from the dread and fear they felt." Ebert (ibid.) further enticed gorehounds by explaining the progression of emotions,

> Horror movies were fun, sure, but this was pretty strong stuff. There wasn't a lot of screaming anymore; the place was pretty quiet… the kids in the audience were stunned. There was almost complete silence. The movie had long ago stopped being delightfully scary, and had become unexpectedly terrifying. A little girl across the aisle from me, maybe nine years old, was sitting very still in her seat and crying… I don't think the younger kids really knew what hit them. They'd seen horror movies before, but this was something else. This was ghouls eating people – you could actually see what they were eating. This was little girls killing their mothers. This was being set on fire. Worst of all, nobody got out alive – even the hero got killed.

Gore was nothing new to horror films, Herschel Gordon Lewis employed ultraviolence in films like *Blood Feast* (1963) and *Color Me Blood Red* (1964), but Gordon's and others attempts at marketing in the disgusting were so apparently fake that they could not be taken seriously (Becker 2006: 55). The gore factor also roused criticism over the MPAA's management of film content. With the PCA in shambles, a suitable replacement would not be put in place until November 1968 (one month after *Night*'s release). Prior to an age-specific ratings system, there was a two-category classification system that labeled films as suitable for general audiences while others were simply suggested for mature audiences, but Walter Reade did not abide by its dictates (Ebert 1969, Heffernan 2002). It was in this brief gap that *Night* played in children's matinees to the horror of Roger Ebert (1969: 128) who wrote, "[c]ensorship isn't the answer to something like this – it never is. But I would be ashamed to argue for the 'right' of those little girls and boys to see that film."

Moreover, the decision to shoot in black-and-white, initially a budgetary one, suddenly aided the film's reputation. Even though most films were now shot in color, news reporting was still done in black and white. Thus, using handheld cameras and

natural lighting in tandem with black-and-white film stock added to the intensity of the film by giving it documentary quality reminiscent of Vietnam War coverage (Higashi 1990) and Civil Rights movement (Hervey 2008: 22-24) . Though accidental, the capture of racial and social discord propelled *Night* beyond the parochial bounds of a typical weirdie into a cultural object that allowed "viewers to participate in the drama of particular tensions" (Kinkade and Katovich 1992: 196). As the reviews Beaupre and Ebert attest, the film's unflinching violence and its capricious killing of the hero were something different, something that reverberated with many audiences viewing the film. The discontinuities of violence-fused political pessimism "articulate[d] a deep sense of hopelessness" (Becker 2006: 58) that metonymically transformed the zombies of the weirdies into the zombies of social commentary and, in turn, re-charted the ideational path of the zombie genre. At the nadir of the sixties countercultural movements, *Night* bespoke to the cynical terror that "the real horror…is that there is nothing we can do that will make any difference at all" (Dillard 1987: 28).

7.5 "One of the Best Horror Films Ever Produced": Reception and Legacy

Initial reviews brushed *Night* off as an insignificant, if not, morally lamentable and forgettable film from a group of talentless Pittsburgh filmmakers who succeeded more in inducing vomit than artistic provocation. For instance, *Motion Picture Herald'*s Tony Vellela (1968: 54) dismissed *Night* as derivative of other weirdies, "[w]e have a rather familiar radiation-has-caused-problems-we-hadn't-thought-of script, this time returning the dead to life, to feed on living flesh." Vincent Canby's (1968: 59) *New York Times* review, barely exceeding one-hundred words, dismissively wrote, "*Night of the Living Dead* is a grainy little movie acted by what appear to be nonprofessional actors,

who are besieged in a farm house by some other nonprofessional actors who stagger around, stiff-legged, pretending to be flesh-eating ghouls." *Film Daily*'s Lous Pelegrine (1968: 7) delivered the only early positive review from a mainstream source, clairvoyantly quipping, "[w]ith *Night of the Living Dead* Image Ten, a new Pittsburgh company, starts off with a wallop as a producer of theatrical motion pictures. *This is a pearl of a horror picture which exhibits all the earmarks of a 'sleeper.'* Accorded the right exploitation, it could make a whole of a boxoffice showing" (emphasis added). Chiming in a few months late, *Los Angeles Times'* critic Kevin Thomas (1969: G11) called *Night* "a genuinely scary little horror picture" and applauded George Romero for building "an amazing amount of suspense." Surprisingly, with exception of Pelegrine none of the early mainstream reviews mention race (e.g Beaupre 1968, Canby 1968, Vellela 1968), seeming more preoccupied with their disgust than the film's narrative. Thomas (1969: G11) made note of race calling the Ben character a "resourceful Negro" and mentioned that Duane Jones "has what it takes to go on to bigger things."

After rerelease *Night*'s critical reputation began to change through a combination of American and European critics (Hervey 2008: 17-21). Suddenly *Night* was artistic and socially subversive. Writing for the *Village Voice,* Richard McGuiness ([1969] 2007: 182) cheered, "*Night of the Living Dead* (directed by George A. Romero and seen occasionally on 42nd Street) is crude, derivative, and one of the best horror films ever produced." McGuinness ([1969] 2007: 183) also discussed the significance of race, "[t]he final twist is that even he [Ben] is killed, except by everyday monsters. His natural enemies, Pittsburgh cops and rednecks (the credits acknowledge the assistance of the local police department), out early shooting ghouls in the brain, shoot him without trying

to find out whether he's alive or a living dead." Likewise, Elliott Stein (1970: 105) of *Sight and Sound* quipped, "[t]he main character is black – but not only is the point not rubbed in – it's not mentioned once." Stein (ibid.) also likened the zombies to the silent majority: "[w]ho are these ghouls, who are these saviours, all of them so horrifying, so convincing, who mow down, defoliate and gobble up everything in their path? [They are the] 'silent majority.'" *Night*'s newly found success led to an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art before setting off an early round of academic criticism (see especially Dillard 1987). Two years after its initial release, *Night* made *Variety*'s (1971) list of "Big Rental Films of 1970," however, another peculiarity of the film was about to take center stage. Just prior to release, Walter Reade decided to change the name of the film from *Night of the Flesh Eaters* to *Night of the Living Dead*. Unfortunately, the switched title screens left off the copyright notice, meaning the film immediately went into the public domain. According David Pierce (2007: 129) many exhibitors exhibited the film without paying a rental fee. While this meant the crew would see little money from the film, it ironically helped further cement a new generic ecology for zombies because in the words of Jonathan Bailey (2011: n.p.), "With a well-understood set of clear-cut rules, others were able to build on and expand on the work without paying a licensing fee or fear of being sued. This helped grow the genre, especially during the long wait between "official" sequels."

In a *Castle of Frankenstein* article, horror analyst Calvin Beck (1972: 30) traced the lineage of *Night* back to *White Zombie* (1932), *The Ghost Breakers* (1940), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) and through weirdies like *The Last Man Earth* before noting "[o]n the surface, [*Night of the Living Dead*] seems like a fusion of *The Last Man on Earth*

(AIP, 1964) that starred Vincent Price, and *Invisible Invaders* (UA, 1959) with John Carradine and John Agar" and that "both films could have served as rough blueprints." Beyond its textual lineage to other weirdies and zombie films, it is *Night*'s discontinuities that changed the course of zombie historiography. That is, *Night*'s controversy for being included in children's matinees despite its violence, it's casting of black actor in a lead role and not making mention of his race, its closest thing to hero – a black male – is indiscriminately shot in the head by a group of white sent to contain the spread of the zombies which gave the film a pessimistic ending with clear racial overtones during the cresting Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, *Night* lacked a copyright notice which immediately put it in the public domain, costing its producers millions of dollars, sparking a heated legal still unresolved some forty-plus years later (Lucas and Roe 2008) and the film also became subject to the (f)utility of Hollywood's ability to self-regulate movie content. And of course, *Night* launched the career of the man most associated with the monster, George A. Romero. Most importantly for the zombie genre, though *Night* crystalized many of the zombie's evolving characteristics into a film that was successful and therefore helped to cement a new generic ecology (Bishop 2010a: 103, Dendle 2001: 5-6, Pulliam 2007: 734).

7.6 Conclusion

In the latter half of the sixties, with social and racial turmoil hitting its apogee, cinematic violence became box office gold despite the outcry of "respectable" critics (Prince 2000b). When a group of frustrated young filmmakers met in a Pittsburgh restaurant over provolone sandwiches and beer, they resolved to make a film that would not skimp on the gore. Taking ideas derivative of weirdies (Heffernan 2002, 2004: 214-

228) and infusing them into an unflinchingly violent cinematic text, their effort was at first dismissed as an "orgy of sadism" (Beaupre 1968: 3) of "below average work" (Vellela 1968: 54). In short, the "flesheating zombies on a warpath" "did not impress the…reviewers" (*Variety* 1968c: 19). While *Night*'s continuities with other weirdies served as the basis of its initial dismissal, it this connection, often elided in extant scholarship that is key to its labeling as a zombie film (cf. Beck 1972, Dillard 1987). Written-off by its distributor and critics, *Night*'s reputation slowly grew as a film that spoke to the disenchanted utopists who felt their cause(s) suffered irreparable defeat (Becker 2006, Hervey 2008). Anomalies within *Night*, its black hero and his shocking death, its documentary aesthetic, and its nihilistic violence took on revelatory aspects unintended by its makers that dislodged *Night* from a typical "full-length feature weirdie" (*Variety* 1969a: 31) into a metonymical microcosm of its sociopolitical context. It is this legacy and departure – materially bound, but temporally propelled – that formally signaled divorcement of the zombie from its Caribbean situ (Dendle 2001: 4-5). Accidents of history often plot the course of industrially created cultural objects (Anand 2000; Peterson 1990, 1997) as the story of *Night* helps demonstrate. Equipped with the simple motive of making a Monster Flick to make money the producers behind *Night* combined existing tropes of the weirdie in a novel manner that altered the historiography of the zombie. However, as the work of Richard Nowell (2011a, 2013) suggests, one breakaway does not a genre make, novel combinations require reinforcements through similar successes. As the next chapter will show, *Night* did not immediately remake the genre as is commonly understood. Rather, there existed a stochastic intermediary period until *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) finally institutionalized the changes that *Night* triggered.

Chapter 8 : "An X-Rating is so Tainted; It Kills Your Film – No Major Will Distribute It": The Pyrrhic Institutionalization of Modern American Zombie Cinema

8.1 The Days After Night

Its long-term legacy beyond repute (see Bishop 2010a: 94-128; Dendle 2001: 7-8. 121-123; Hervey 2008; Kawin 2012: 118-125; Pulliam 2007), scholars have overestimated *Night of the Living Dead*'s (1968) (referred to hereafter as *Night*) immediate impact on contemporaneous horror trends specifically and low-budget filmmaking more generally. Richard Nowell (2011b: 31), for instance, points out that major studios ignored low-budget horror productions from the years 1968 to 1976 preferring, instead, to produce their own. Moreover, only one film, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* (1972) – another horror film of low-budget origins, attempted to directly copy *Night*'s ecological model.[10] By way of comparison, *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), which along with *Night* horror scholar Gregory Waller (1987: 2) argues helped usher in the "modern era of horror," spawned a studio sponsored cycle of supernatural horror films that dominated most of the 1970s (see Cook 2000: 222-228; Fischer 1996; Nowell 2011a: 128, 2011c: 125-128; Sobchack 1987). Similarly, *Easy Rider* (1969), like *Night* a hit with young audiences, led to a spate of youth revolt pictures throughout the early 1970s (see Cook 2000: 71-72, 162-172; Hall 2002: 16-17; Morton 1985b). Further examination of the claim that *Night* singlehandedly reinvented zombie cinema reveals what film theorist Leger Grindon (2012: 45) refers to as a cluster in zombie films

[10] David Cook (2000: 223) argues *Night* triggered a trend in "rural gothic films," but only names *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) as generic offspring.

following *Night*. In clusters there is a failure of a group of genre films "to generate a coherent model or common motifs among productions from the same period" (see tables 8.1 and 8.2 for overviews of the zombie films discussed in this chapter). Even though *Night* helped popularize zombie cinema's most recognizable diegetics such as images of social desolation, dangerous infected Others, piles of human corpses, and survivalist groups, it took a reinforcing hit like *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) (referred to hereafter as *Dawn*) to crystalize zombies' generic ecology. According to Stephen Thrower (2007: 250) "it wasn't until Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) reiterated that zombies are flesh-eating reanimated corpses that other films finally toed the line." In short, *Night* with its reported $1 million in box office revenue (*Variety* 1971),[11] failed to make a large (or small) immediate impact in the filmmaking industries and it did not reinvent zombie cinema alone.

Following Thrower (2007), I argue in this chapter that *Dawn*, not *Night*, institutionalized zombie cinema insofar as it solidified a textual model that could organizationally recognized and reproduced (DiMaggio 1982; Kaplan 2012; Peterson 1978, 1990, 1997: 185-201), however I argue *Dawn* pyrrhically institutionalized zombie cinema as mainstream producers dared not to copy it. More broadly, I accomplish three tasks in this chapter: 1) I explain why it took approximately ten years from *Night* to establish zombies' modern ecology by clarifying the auspicial milieus of production and explaining transition problems with zombie cinema's ecology, 2) I locate the cluster of sixteen zombie films produced in the intersession period by highlighting the opportunity

[11] Because of both *Night*'s lack of copyright notice and theaters exhibiting the film without paying rental fees, it is impossible to gauge the true success of the film as well as separate fact from lore. *Variety* (1980b: 5) eventually estimated *Night*'s box office at $30 million. However, the fact of the matter is that neither the major or independent studios to follow-up on *Night*'s cult success.

spaces available to low-budget independent filmmakers,[12] and 3) I discuss how the stabilization of zombies' endogenous genre ecology resulted in a mid-term instance of Pyrrhic institutionalization – or a textual model of unlikely cultivation by the extant milieus of production – which severely limited zombies' mainstream transition capacity as they entered the 1980s and 1990s.

Table 8.1: The Cluster of Zombie Films Released Between *Night* and *Dawn*

Film	Year	Producer	Distributor
Astro Zombies	1968	Ram Ltd.	Geneni Film Distributors
Let's Scare Jessica to Death	1971	The Jessica Company	Paramount
Blood of Ghastly Horror	1972	Independent International Pictures	Independent International Pictures
Garden of the Dead	1972	Millenium Productions	Entertainment Pyramid Inc.
Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things	1973	Geneni Film Distributors	Geneni Film Distributors
Messiah of Evil	1973	V/M Production	International Cinefilm
Deathdream	1974	Quadrant Films	Europix International
House of Seven Corpses	1974	Television Corporation of America	International Amusements Corp.
House on Skull Mountain	1974	Chocolate Chip	Twentieth Century-Fox
Shanks	1974	Paramount	Paramount
Sugar Hill	1974	American International Pictures	Astral Films
Dead Don't Die	1975	Douglas S. Cramer Company	National Broadcasting Company (NBC)
Frozen Scream	1975	Independently Produced	Independently Released
Shock Waves	1977	Zopix Company	Joseph Brenner Associates
The Child	1977	Panorama Films	Boxoffice International Pictures
Blue Sunshine	1978	Ellanby Films	Cinema Shares International Distribution

[12] Because many the intersession zombie films slipped the purview of the trade press, I necessarily rely on post-hoc DVD commentaries (which have been unavailable for the bulk of films examined thus far) and Stephen Thrower's *Nightmare USA: The Untold Story of Exploitation Independents* which contains many insightful interviews from the casts and crews of the films discussed in this chapter.

Table 8.2: Synopses of Zombie Films Produced Between *Night* and *Dead*

Film	Brief Synopsis
Astro Zombies (1968)	Released a few months before *Night*, *Astro Zombies* combines horror, science-fiction, and espionage in an incoherent text with skull-faced zombies who have had their brains wiped clean and reactivated through electricity and 'thought waves.'
Let's Scare Jessica to Death (1971)	Jessica is released from a sanatorium and travels with her husband and his friend to an isolated farmhouse. Upon arrival they discover a hippy woman named Emily residing inside. Emily starts living with the group and manages to seduce Jessica's husband. This causes Jessica to think that Emily is a vampire and the townspeople are zombies.
Blood of Ghastly Horror (1972)	A confusing confabulation of previously shot footage, *Blood of Ghastly Horror*, sees a mad scientist trying track down his son's killers with the aid of his zombie, Akro.
Garden of the Dead (1972)	In a forced labor penal colony, a group of inmates who regularly inhale formaldehyde are shot and killed in an attempted escape only to be revivified when their preferred drug seeps into their shallow graves.
Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things (1973)	In the lone direct copy of *Night* a group of young filmmakers accidently raises the dead with an ancient incantation. As in *Night*, the crew barricades themselves in nearby abandoned house only to have the zombies consume them all.
Messiah of Evil (1973)	A young woman, Arletty, attempts to reunite with her estranged father. Unable to find her father in the small coastal California town, she discovers the locals have cannibalistic penchants which are linked to a curse placed on the town.
Deathdream (1974)	Andy is killed in the battlefields of Vietnam, but is brought back to life through the wishes of his mother. Andy returns home, but he is not the same. Andy is literally dead and must feed on the blood of others to prevent bodily decay.
House of Seven Corpses (1974)	A film crew attempts to shoot a horror film in an actual haunted house. They accidently raise a zombie from the grave which then proceeds to kill the crew one-by-one.
House on Skull Mountain (1974)	An entry in the Blaxploitation cycle, *House on Skull Mountain* combines aspects of haunted house films with cinematic voodoo. The main narrative circulates around the grandchildren of Pauline Christophe who are summoned to the matriarch's mansion to hear a reading of the will. The grandchildren are individually killed by home's caretaker; the zombie of Pauline Christophe appears at the end of the film.
Shanks (1974)	An aging scientist with a mime assistant, Malcolm, experiments on reanimating animals. The scientist and the Malcolm's family turn up dead. A grieved Malcolm turns his former boss and family into zombie puppets.
Sugar Hill (1974)	A combination of Blaxploitation and revenge film, *Sugar Hill* revolves around an eponymous character who calls upon a voodoo priest to avenge the death of her husband.
Dead Don't Die (1975)	In a made-for-TV zombie film, Don Drake attempts to the clear the name of his wrongfully executed brother. Don's journey takes him from one seedy location to another and uncovers a plot by a voodoo master who is raising the recently dead in a plot to take over the world.
Frozen Scream (1975)	Two mad scientists search for immortality by experimenting on medical students turning them into zombies in the process. Reduced to a catatonic state, the scientists then use the zombies as errand runners.
Shock Waves (1977)	Genetically altered German super-soldiers circa World War II, emerge from their watery graves to wreak havoc on shipwrecked passengers from a cruise ship.
The Child (1977)	A young girl, Rosalie, uses her supernatural powers to create undead friends. When not using her zombies as playmates, they become instruments of revenge.
Blue Sunshine (1978)	A combination of horror and conspiracy thriller *Blue Sunshine* suggests that ten years after consuming a bad batch of LSD, a group of hippies turn into bald and crazy zombies.

8.2 New Hollywood and New Zombies: The Majors' Lack of Response

Development of *Night* occurred at the juncture of two industrial phases of filmmaking. Discussed last chapter, *Night*'s production and release corresponded to the waning phases of weirdie cinema, a style of production heavily influencing low-budget filmmaking from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. *Night*'s release likewise coordinated with the beginning of "New Hollywood." An imprecise nomenclature, New Hollywood is *not* a term employed by the industry, but serves as "a critical construction emerging from different accounts that describe changes in Hollywood film-making from the 1960s onwards" (King 2007: 60). Seen as possessing phases, New Hollywood's first phase (c. 1967-1975), sometimes called the Hollywood Renaissance (King 2002: 11-48, Tzioumakis 2006: 169-172), afforded tremendous creative discretion to young filmmakers and resulted in some of the most innovative and progressive films revelatory of the era's zeitgeist (see Cook 2000: 67-72, King 2002: 11-48, Tzioumakis 2006: 169-184). New Hollywood's second phase (post-1975), on the other hand, witnessed a stifling of creativity with the advent of big-budgeted, heavily advertised "event" pictures, a trend that continues to present day (Cook 2000: 25-65, Hall 2002: 19-24, Hall and Neale 2010: 213-259, King 2002: 49-84, Krämer 2005, Schatz 1993, Wyatt 1994).

Hollywood's brief experiment in cultivating the artistic sentiments of young directors was an artifact of a deep recession from 1969 to 1971 that nearly crippled the industry, not a wont to turn cinema into art (Balio 1990b: 9-11, Cook 2000: 67-157, Hall 2002: 16-17, G. King 2002, N. King (2007: 60-64, Wyatt 1999: 239-240). In the words of Geoff King (2002: 90), "[t]he industry was in difficulties and latched onto a new generation of filmmakers who held the promise of being able to attract a new and

younger audience. Freedom was a product of uncertainty and transition." Hollywood's new breed of auteurist director synthesized standard genre formulae with European art cinema (2007: 60), efforts that were augured by the institution of the Code and Ratings Administration (CARA) in November 1968 (Lewis 2002: 143-156). CARA divided motion pictures into four age-gradated categories (initially G, M, R, and X) which allowed for high- (and low-) minded directors push the artist limits of motions pictures further generations past, particularly in regards to sex and violence (Lewis 2002; Sandler 2002, 2007; Wyatt 1999). According to Thomas Schatz (1993: 16) the experiment ended when *The Godfather*'s staggering $81.5 box office gross (*Variety* 1973a) restored confidence in blockbuster film (Cook 2000: 14), a trend institutionalized by the reinforcing revenues of *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977) (Cook 2000: 40-43, Hall and Neale 2010: 213-259, King 2002: 54-59, Schatz 1993). Even though Hollywood's experimental turn was short-lived, it seems there should have been enough of an opportunity space to afford the production of a studio follow-up to *Night*, particularly because of *Night*'s reputation with young audiences.

Trained in major university film programs, New Hollywood auteurs viewed the silver screen as an artistic medium to convey sociopolitical messages (Baumann 2007: 105-108). This view of cinema corresponded at a time when horror was widely viewed as a disreputable genre (Cook 2000: 200, Wood 2004) and therefore limited Hollywood's auteurs embracement of the genre with some notable exceptions (Cook 2000: 224-226). For instance, William Friedkin directed *The Exorcist* (1973) and Brian De Palma directed several horror film including *Carrie* (1976), *The Fury* (1978), and *Dressed to Kill* (1980). It is important to note that the artistry of supernatural/possession had been established a

few years earlier with the critical and commercial success of *Rosemary*'s *Baby* (see Cook 2000: 223, *Variety* 1968b). Moreover, many viewed Brian De Palma as the heir apparent to Alfred Hitchcock both of whom made "artistic thrillers" not straight-up horror films – a socially constructed distinction, but an important one with real consequences (Kapsis 1992: 118-215). More enamored with profits and balance sheets, the majors produced big-budget horror films in the vein of the most apparently salable (Cohn 1982b). In part because of its estimated $12.3 million in rentals during the year of its releasae (1969b), *Rosemary's Baby* dictated the directions of the majors' horror production for most of the 1970s (Cohn 1980, Wiener 1977). Following *Rosemary's Baby* impressive box-office, *The Exorcist* earned a then staggering $66.3 million (*Variety* 1975) which, in turn, led to follow-up productions like *The Omen* (1976), *The Sentinel* (1976), *Burnt Offerings* (1976), and major studio purchase of similar independently completed films such as *The Premonition* (1976) and *Audrey Rose* (1977). The trend of demonic possession films abated only when *The Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977) failed to return significantly more than its initial investment (Nowell 2011b: 31-32, 2011c: 128). Afterwards, the surprising performance of *Carrie* coupled with production trends indicting profitability in teen romance films favored youth-oriented horror films over roving hordes of zombies (Kapsis 1992: 159-176; Nowell 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Shary 2012: 588-589).

In contrast to the horror films produced and distributed by major studios, *Night* was not immediately popular and its "official" success was not that impressive. When *Night* reached *Variety*'s list of top earning films, it was two years after *Night*'s initial release and *Night*'s $1 million in box-office was good enough for 71st place (*Variety* 1971), hardly the sort of ticket sales coveted by major studios. The mainstream successes

of other horror films easily overshadowed *Night*'s discovery in the midnight movie circuit (see Murphy 1978), but several intra-industrial adjustments in response to the new ratings system deserve mention. Hollywood's adoption of an age-based rating system demonstrated an early willingness to experiment with "legitimate" X-rated/adult films like *The Killing of Sister George* (1968), *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and even softcore pornographic features such as *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970) (Lewis 2002: 171-181). By late 1971, industry watchers Charles Champlin (1971) and A.D. Murphy (1972) reported a mainstream (and to a lesser extent exploitation independent) abandonment of X-rated films. Though some zombie films like *Blood of Ghastly Horror, Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things, Deathdream, and Sugar Hill* received PG ratings, their box-office performance ranged from poor to moderate, suggesting to other producers that *Night* offered the most profitable model of zombie film to pursue. *Night*, however, posed significant problems for an R-rating as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Night's emergence as an underground hit not only occurred when ratings controversies caused a strategic retreat by the major studios from controversial films (*Los Angeles Times* 1975a, 1975b; *Variety* 1973c, 1973d, 1974a, 1974b), but also when horror was being institutionalized as an R-rated genre (Cook 2000: 222-226; Nowell 2011a: 39-41, 2011b: 33-34; Sandler 2002: 213-214). Initially relying on set-piece killings with minimal blood, slasher films circumvented ratings issues to become the most popular type of horror film in the late-1970s and early-1980s after the industry lost confidence in demonic possession films (Cohn 1982b; Dika 1987; Kapsis 2009; Nowell 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Zombies, on the other hand, proved popular only by employing shocking images

of the living dead devouring human flesh, a significant content hurdle considering concerns over cinematic violence. This combined with zombies' meek silver screen résumé meant an inability to transfer into the organizational rationales of studio decision makers. With the memory of a deep industry recession still fresh, investing money in a still unproven subgenre would have been foolish, especially with the salability of other horror subgenres well established.

If Hollywood was unwilling to invest in another zombie film, then why did George Romero wait ten years to release another? In 1970, George Romero's star reached enviable heights. Fresh off an appearance at the Museum of Modern Art, the Pittsburgh business community buzzed in their willingness to invest in another Romero/Latent Image picture. According to biographer Paul Gagne (1987: 41), the Regional Industrial Development Corporation, an investor in *Night*, was willing to invest $80,000 in a new Romero film. Romero declined, "I didn't want to get typecast or go right back out and do something that would have been similar or pretty much the same as *Night of the Living Dead*. I didn't really have a good idea for extending the story" (qtd. in Gagne 1987: 41). Romero chose to experiment with other genres like romantic comedy in *There's Always Vanilla* (1971) and feminist drama in *Jack's Wife* (1973) before returning to horror in *The Crazies* (1973). All three films failed commercially, tarnishing Romero's image as a potentially moneymaking director in the process (Gagne 1987: 41-56). Romero reemerged after the moderate success of *Martin* (1977), an offbeat update of the vampire film. In short, Romero waited because felt he was not in the position to adequately create a sequel to *Night* and chose to focus his efforts elsewhere.

8.3 The Exploitation Independents' Lack of Response

Explaining Hollywood's lack of response in cannibalistic zombies is easy enough, but understanding why independent filmmakers and producers did not imitate *Night* poses a more vexing problem. After all, independent filmmakers and producers faced less restrictions when dealing with ratings (Murphy 1972, Thrower 2007), could strive for more modest returns of investment (Cook 2007, Lowry 2005, Thrower 2007), and were theoretically better at scanning for exploitable fads (Crane 1997, Peters and Anand 2004: 316-317). I distill two levels of explanation for why independent filmmakers did not exploit *Night*: institutional and idiosyncratic. This is not to say that zombie films were not produced (I will explore them in the next section), but that *Night* lacked a flurry of copycat zombie films. The institutional contours of independent filmmaking during the early- to mid-1970s were cutthroat and perilous as much as they were potentially profitable (Nowell 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Thrower 2007; Tzioumakis 2006: 192-212). Richard Nowell (2011b: 30) points out that less than 1% of independently produced and distributed pictures made it into the top twenty of the annual rental charts in the years between 1973 and 1978, and many failed to make any money at all (cf. Murphy 1976a, Thrower 2007). Many problems experienced by independents trace back to uncertainties and instability in independent distribution. *New York Times* reporter Nicholas Gage (1975), for instance, discovered the involvement of organized crime in the distribution of pornography and the use of strong-arm tactics to minimize filmmakers' profits in order to maximize the distributors'. *Garden of the Dead*, one of the zombie films discussed below, witnessed such problems when producer Dan Cady sued Omni Pictures Corp. and Jaco Productions Inc. over withholding profits (*Variety* 1974c), a situation fairly common

for other low-budget filmmakers (Nowell 2011a, 2011b; Thrower 2007). Richard Nowell (2011a: 107-120, 2011b: 30, 2013) also argues that even successful textual film models untapped by the majors may not trigger a cycle of like productions from independents if the model demonstrates distributive difficulties (among others). Recalling last chapter, this happened to *Night* (and *Dawn* as I discuss later). Given the volatility of independent distribution and the fact that home video had yet to materialize, it made little institutional sense to directly model a film off of *Night* despite the high demand for completed films (Murphy 1976b, 1976c) and reasonable expectation of profit (Cohn 1980, 1984).

Modest showings by *Night*'s first knock-off, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*, bolstered skepticism in zombies (see Adilman 1973). Similarly, in 1973, Europix International reissued three films, *Curse of the Living Dead* (originally released as *Kill Baby, Kill* in 1966), *Fangs of the Living Dead* (a 1969 Spanish film originally titled *Malenka*), and *Revenge of the Living Dead* (a film whose origins I cannot determine) as a triple bill. Advertised as an "Orgy of the Living Dead" and obviously exploiting the popularity of *Night*, the package did reasonable business, but relied on extensive ballyhoo not easily replicated by others (*Variety* 1973b). Without a strong performance from a follow-up film, it was easy to attribute the cult status of *Night* to a one-off event. Not prone to chasing questionable trends, Richard Nowell (2011a: 108) maintains "most American independents actually preferred to follow trends that boasted track records and that those who did adapt new textual models did so under exceptional circumstances and went to extraordinary lengths to mitigate the perceived risks of their conduct." Observers, however, credit *Night* as demonstrative of the idea that a group of spirited and resourceful filmmakers could create a motion picture with little to no budget outside the auspices of

the major studios and is said to have inspired now-legendary filmmakers Wes Craven and Tobe Hooper to direct their own horror films (cf. Becker 2006, Cook 2000: 222-224, Heffernan 2004: 214-228, Hervey 2008, Kane 2010, Waller 1987: 2). Wes Craven, director of *Last House on the Left* (1972) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), remembers

> [*Night of the Living Dead*], more than anything else I can think of, liberated me to make *Last House on the Left*, because I knew that after that there was a whole new kind of film blossoming in American cinema. It was something hybrid that mixed terror and laughter and social comment into one heady, totally unpredictable witches' brew of entertainment unlike anything I'd ever experienced before" (qtd. in Kane 2010: xvi).

This is where the second level of explanation, the idiosyncratic, materializes. Directors like Craven took artistic inspiration from *Night*, choosing not to replicate it. They saw their films as homages to the spirit of *Night*, not shrewd cash-ins or rip-offs.

8.4 Astro Zombies, Nazi Zombies, Zombie Marionettes, Zombie Soldiers and Other Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Crazy Mixed-up Zombies

Scholars pay scant attention to the zombie films produced between *Night* and *Dawn*. Perhaps this is because the cluster of films offer "no coherent direction, and the links between the diverse films are weak" (Grindon 2007: 404). Attempting to make sense of the cluster of zombie films, Jamie Russell (2006: 73) suggests the seeming preponderance of drug and hippie dystopia in films like *Let's Scare Jessica to Death, Garden of the Dead, Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things, Messiah of Evil, Deathdream, Frozen Scream,* and *Blue Sunshine* serve as a "backlash against the utopian hippie dream" and collectively they "toy with fears about the dangers of mind-altering drugs and rampant sexuality, while displaying a stark mistrust of the strangeness of other people." Russell's definition of mid-1970s zombie films, however, includes pictures like *The Crazies* and *Shivers* (1975) which were neither industrially or self-identified as such.

Moreover, other zombie films including *Sugar Hill* and *House on Skull Mountain* tap into the trend of Blaxploitation cinema, while films like *Shanks* and *The Child* slip conventional generic understandings altogether. Russell (2006: 76-80) recognizes this, but the existence of Blaxploitation zombie films and hard to categorize zombie films problematizes isomorphic reflectionist readings. My industrially centered, reception-discourse sensitive approach reveals two factors undergirding the logic of the pre-*Dawn*, post-*Night* zombie film cluster. First, the circumstances of production rendered horror films one of the few moneymaking genres open to low-budget filmmakers (Cohn 1980, 1984; Farley 1977; Harmetz 1979; Lowry 2005: 41-43; McCarty 1995; Thrower 2007; *Variety* 1982). Second, nearly all the filmmakers understood their pictures as containing, but only bear tangential similarities to *Night*. Stephen Thrower (2007: 238) rightly points out that many of these films were made soon enough after *Night* not to have its textual formula weigh on their production, but it also demonstrates a point I have been making since the beginning of this study: that the zombie's endogenous genre ecology allows it to be seen and evoked in contradictory embodiments.

The 1970s was a booming, if volatile, period for low-end cinematic production, especially for horror films (Barry 1977; Cohn 1980, 1984; Murphy 1976a, 1976b, 1976c). The majors' decision to capitalize fewer and bigger films opened tremendous opportunity spaces in various exhibition markets, particularly inner city theaters (Atkinson 2007) and Southern drive-ins (Romao 2003, Von Doziak 2005). The opening of these markets led to the erection of companies almost exclusively dedicated to one or both (Cohn 1984, Knoblauch 1975, Lowry 2005, Thrower 2007). Though the majors re-oligopolized the industry with their discovery of the mega-blockbuster (e.g. *Jaws* and *Star Wars*),

capturing 85-90% of tickets sales as a result (Murphy 1976b: 5), astute filmmakers could still turn hefty profits by catering to niche audiences (Cohn 1980, 1984; Gillette 1975; Lowry 2005; Thrower 2007; Tzioumakis 2006: 197-200). According to Ed Lowry (2005: 41-43) there was enough vitality in the niches for Roger Corman to form New World Pictures in 1970 and Lawrence Woolner – another notable low-budget producer – to found Dimension Pictures one year later. The competition between low-budget exploitation producers catalyzed a host of "R-rated sub-genres" which Ed Lowry (2005: 43) argues included, "the softcore nurse/teacher/stewardess film, the women's prison picture, the graphic/erotic horror movie, the imported kung-fu actioner, and the whole range of blaxploitation" (see also Barry 1977). The cluster of sixteen interim zombie are best understood as part of the filmmaking rush that catered to these emergent conditions. Indeed, with the exception of *Shanks*, each film in the zombie cluster originates from modest producers working with modest budgets (frequently dipping below $100,000).[13] Likewise, with the exception of *Let's Scare Jessica Death* (a negative pickup for Paramount) and *Shanks*, all the zombie films were independently distributed. Ted V. Mikels, the writer/producer/director of *Astro Zombies* (among other low-budget genre films), for instance, succeeded mostly in Southern drive-ins (Gay 1995) which *Variety* (1969d: 3) suggested was *Astro Zombies*' "only conceivable market." In an interview with *Incredibly Strange Film Show*, Mikels unashamedly admitted, "I make the film I can afford to make. And I make the film that I feel is currently a topic that is salable in the market" (qtd. in Harries 1988). Similarly, *Garden of the Dead* was made specifically to

[13] *Frozen Scream*'s budget was reported as no more than $35,000, slightly less than *Astro Zombies*' estimated $37,000. *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* and *Messiah of Evil* were the two of the higher budgeted interim zombie films with the former costing $200,000 and the latter $100,000. By comparison, *Night*'s budget of $114,000 was considered to be extremely low-budget just a few years earlier.

serve as the bottom half of double bills in the South (Thrower 2007: 251) and as such bears generic scenery associated with the region; a trait commonly, but not always, shared with other films targeted at the market (cf. Romao 2003, Von Doziak 2005). As filmmakers catered to the South with "Southern-flavored" films, the growth of black audiences in urban theaters (see Beaupre 1967) led to the construction of Blaxploitation films (Guerrero 1993: 69-111, Kraszewski 2002, Plutzik 1979). Linked to the industry recession between 1969 and 1971, Hollywood noticed the lucrativeness of black patrons and began fashioning thinly veiled racist appropriations of imagined ghetto culture and black life for inner city audiences (Guerrero 1993: 69-111). Triggered by *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*'s (1971) $4.1 million box office (*Variety* 1972), the majors released follow-up films like *Shaft* (1971) and *Superfly* (1972) to ride the production trend. Eventually the production of Blaxploitation films led to Blaxploitation horror films including *Blacula* (1972), *Abby* (1974); and two zombie films, *House on Skull Mountain* and *Sugar Hill*. *Sugar Hill* was actually a follow-up American International Picture's successful foray into Blaxploitation horror (Getze 1974); it was preceded by the above mentioned *Blacula* and its sequel *Scream Blacula Scream* (1973).

Not every film in the zombie cluster so blatantly exploited its intended audience, however. As indicated in interviews and DVD commentaries of filmmakers and crews associated with each film in the cluster, deciding on a (zombie) horror film was a pragmatic one to break into the film industry (Clark 2004; Ormsby, Daly, Cronin 2010; Sherman 2001; Thrower 2007; Wiederhorn, Ormsby, and Ray 2004). According to analyst Lawrence Cohn (1984: 3) virtually any horror film produced during the 1970s "could reasonably be expected to deliver two good weeks of business in recent" which

was often all some films needed to turn a profit on investment (cf. Cook 2007, Nowell 2011b, Thrower 2007). In deciding to shoot a horror film, producer/writer/director of *Messiah of Evil*, Willard Huyck matter-of-factly noted, "[a] group of private investors in Texas had been convinced to put up money for a 'commercial' genre movie – and they decided they all just loved horror films. It wasn't like we had to satisfy a studio or anything, we just finished the script and showed them and they said, 'Yeah, it seems like a horror film'" (qtd. in Thrower 2007: 242). Robert Voskanian, director of *The Child*, similarly volunteered,

> While we [producer Robert Dadashian] were at film school there was a movie out called *Night of the Living Dead*, which made lots of noise: everybody was talking about how some guys from somewhere in the Midwest [sic] made this movie, a big success, with very little money. After Bob and I saw the movie we told ourselves we too could make an independent low-budget movie, and we decided that a horror movie was the best choice (qtd. in Thrower 2007: 353).

Independent filmmakers working in the periphery of the mainstream were given relative creative freedom because they supplied product for exhibitors desperate to fill gaps in their schedules (Murphy 1976a, 1976b, 1976c). Additionally, the imprimatur of the Code and Ratings Administration legitimated R-rated violence and sex (Cook 2000: 222-226, Lewis 2002: 284-293, Lowry 2005, Sandler 2002, Savoy 1968). Meanwhile, horror was undergoing a visual sea change as European monsters were gradually jettisoned in favor of everyday American folk (Cook 2000: 228-229, Dillard 1987, Maddrey 2004: 48-56, Sobchack 1987, Wood 2004). These material and temporal contexts intersected with the zombies' lack of established generic ecology and resulted in some rather unique variants of the creature (cf. Thrower 2007: 41-42). We are, thus, rendered a number of films that decided to evoke zombies, but, because the films were untethered by a strong anchoring tradition, zombies were put to decidedly different uses than in either *Night* or *Dawn*.

In surveying the textual contrasts in the cluster of films, the zombies in *Night* are slow, lumbering, and display diminished cognitive aptitude. Their drive for human flesh is all too apparent and their condition is contagious through bite (probably an exchange of bodily fluids). By comparison, the eponymous "astro zombies" from *Astro Zombies* are synthetically revived individuals under the control of a mad scientist. They are immune to gunfire, lack an anthropophagic penchant, and breakdown – like any battery powered device – when their cybernetic generators run out of power. Scientific experimentation is also the (un)lifeblood behind numerous zombies from the era, including: *Blood of Ghastly Horror, Shanks, Frozen Scream,* and *Shock Waves*, but are narratological executed in different ways. The zombies from *Blood of Ghastly Horror* are created by science, but with dabs of voodoo. The film's main zombie, Akro, seen in the figures above, resembles Frankenstein's monster in his stiff-limbed movement and general mannerisms; advertising for the film, however, clearly associates the creature with the zombie. In *Shanks*, French mime, Marcel Marceau, plays both Malcolm Shanks and an elderly local scientist named Mr. Walker. Malcolm helps Mr. Walker in his experiments to revive dead animals with electrode implants. When the old scientist and Malcolm's abusive family all die, he does the (il)logical thing and uses the electrode technology to turn them into zombie marionettes in order to romantically coo an underage girl. *Frozen Scream* features two college medical instructors experimenting to find the secret to immortality. The zombies resulting from their experiments are used as minions to run errands and are put in freezers when not in use. *Shock Waves* gives us cinema's first Nazi zombies. *Variety's* (1980a: 22) belated and dismissive review described the monsters' origins thusly, "it seems the Nazis were experimenting to create invincible soldiers." The

former persons behind the Nazi zombies happen to be sociopaths. Thirty-plus years later, they have risen from their watery graves to terrorize the marooned passengers from a cruise vessel on a deserted island. The zombies do not attempt to devour their victims, but prefer drowning them instead. They can be killed by taking off their goggles.

Of the films in the cluster, the zombies in *Garden of the Dead* and *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* most closely resemble the creatures in *Night* in terms of appearance and behaviors, but only *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* directly mimics *Night*. In *Garden of the Dead*, formaldehyde resurrects recently killed prisoners who proceed to wage war on the living. The condition is not contagious, the zombies do not eat flesh, their condition does not completely subsume their kinesthetic and cognitive functioning, and they die when sunlight strikes their bodies. In *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*, the dead rise from their graves after the reading of occult material (a ploy also used in *House of Seven Corpses*). They attempt to devour the living, but, again, the condition is not transmittable. The zombies exhibit more reasoning skills than those of *Night*, but their faculties are unmistakably diminished. The zombies from *Messiah of Evil* can also be placed within this group, but not as neatly. Their zombification is the result of a curse placed over the inhabitants of a small town. They develop ravenous appetites for meat, with a preference for human flesh, but are not uncontrollably driven to devour it. Despite being zombies, the town's inhabitants – it seems – go about their daily activities.

The Blaxploitation zombie films from the cluster, *House on Skull Mountain* and *Sugar Hill*, shamelessly (and perhaps predictably) exploit voodoo to different ends. In *House on Skull Mountain*, Thomas, the butler to the palatial estate of Pauline Christophe,

attempts to settle a nineteenth century political feud by killing off Pauline's descendants who have gathered to hear the reading of her will. Thomas uses voodoo to summon a zombified Pauline. The plan backfires as Pauline incapacitates Thomas before returning to her grave. In *Sugar Hill*, the eponymous Sugar Hill – seeking revenge for her fiancé's murder – enlists the help of a voodoo god to summon a brood of zombie hitmen. The zombies are similar to the creatures depicted in *White Zombie* (1932) and *Love Wanga* (1936) in terms of their revival and behavior. They are former Guinean slaves resurrected to the bidding of a zombie master. Their appearance is one of the most unique of the era, "zombies are ridiculous yet scary creatures with bulbous metallic eyes and scale faces, courtesy of George 'Hank' Edds make-up" (Howard 1974: 20).

As suggested by Russell (2006: 71-75), some of the zombie films in the cluster contain subtexts of hippie collapse and/or drug use, but the motif is applied inconsistently. For instance, the zombies in *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* may or may not be a product of the protagonist's LSD-induced paranoia. They are all old white men, local town folk with no aggressive tendencies; their presence, however, is oddly disconcerting. Drug issues are used to different ends in *Deathdream*. The film's sole zombie, a young Vietnam vet named Andy, bears strong similarities to vampires, but his perpetual state of decay and apparent lack of immortality evince some of the main attributes of the zombies in *Night*. Andy keeps himself from decaying by filling syringes with blood and 'shooting up,' drawing parallels to the drug addictions many vets developed as a result of their experiences with the war (Clark 2004). In *Blue Sunshine*, it turns out that LSD has a ten-year gestation period. The zombies are former-hippies-turned-middle-class-Americans

who suddenly go bald and crazy. Their past drug abuse comes back to haunt their present lives.

Some of the cluster zombie pictures are real oddities that cannot be linked with the others. *House of Seven Corpses*, a haunted house film, is an unlikely picture to find a zombie. Regardless, it delivers one when a movie crew –making a horror film – reads a supernatural incantation aloud as part of the script. The summoned zombie is replete with lumpy makeup, heavily blackened eyes, and kills its victims mostly through strangling. A made-for-television crime drama is an equally unusual place for a zombie, but *Dead Don't Die* features a voodoo master operating from the city. The film's zombies, however, are inconsistently portrayed; their activities are tweaked to fit their respective scenes. In *The Child,* the most atypical zombie film of the period, a young child with telekinetic powers raises a group of zombie friends from the grave. The zombies appear thoroughly monstrous with decayed skin, long fingernails, tattered clothes, and darkened eyes. As 'the child' is perturbed by various individuals in her life, her zombie friends handle the situation by killing them. While the zombie films produced between *Night* and *Dawn* intersect with numerous contemporaneous trends (e.g. Blaxploitation, LSD/hippie backlash, 'Southern' intoned geographical settings) they are drawn together by their randomness and differential treatment of the zombie. Stephen Thrower (2007: 250) writes:

> Horror cinema in the early seventies was slowly absorbing the influence of *Night of the Living Dead*. In the half decade after its release in 1968, Romero's landmark film enjoyed gradual word-of-mouth exposure throughout America (spurred on in the public consciousness by a pricelessly hostile review in *Reader's Digest*). A ragtag number of variants followed…What unites these disparate movies is their idiosyncratic refusal simply to mimic the Romero film.

This situation was bulwarked by the zombie's lack of anchoring tradition and uberous conditions for low budget productions. Ironically, these material and temporal conditions, which helped pull the zombie from pillar to post, would institutioanalize the zombie's ecology with the release of *Dawn*, the much anticipated 'sequel' to *Night*.

8.5 'Here *It Is*!!!" The Pyrrhic Institutionalization of Zombie Cinema

After nearly fifty years of recalibration and reinterpretation, *Dawn* institutionalized zombie cinema. When sociologists discuss institutionalization they typically refer to the erection of organizations and interorganizational structures that support the long- or short-term continuation of culture or cultural objects (see especially Peterson 1997: 185-201). These organizations and institutional infrastructures coalesce to transform culture either in the interest of mainstream profit driven agencies (Peterson 1978, 1990, 1997: 185-201; Kaplan 2012) or elite actors (DiMaggio 1982, Kremp 2010), both of which are concerned with enhancing the fitness of the culture they transform and spotting culture worthy of transformation. The institutionalization of zombie cinema is missing the final parts. Its archetypical model, first suggested by *Night* then solidified in *Dawn*, jaundiced its development from mainstream profit driven agencies and elite actors and placed it in the lowest rungs of the filmmaking industry where it remained – with few exceptions – until 2002. And even the bulk of post-2002 zombie films are extremely low-budget straight-to-video productions (Dendle 2012). In 1979, horror reached unprecedented levels of ticket sales (Cohn 1980, Kapsis 1992: 268). *Dawn*, earning $16 million at the box-office (Cohn 1980: 32), played a major part in this feat. When horror became a hot commodity, the infrastructures of the majors and the independents flooded the market as filmmakers identified and pursued the trend (Cohn 1982a). According to

Richard Nowell (2011a), once *Friday the 13th* (1980) validated the salability of carefully crafted slasher films first evidenced in *Halloween* (1978), others followed suit until reaching levels of overproduction (Cohn 1982, Kapsis 2009). In contrast, the unique circumstances of *Dawn*'s production, though cementing what cinematic zombies are and should be, imbued zombies with too many problems to augment their fitness; their ecological cementing was pyrrhic.

With *Night* and *Dawn*, Hollywood knew what zombie films should look like. Being the two most successful and recognizable zombie films to that point, *Night* and *Dawn* would be the litmus test for all subsequent zombie films (Pulliam 2007). Unfortunately for zombies, few wanted to associate with them. Institutional recognition of zombies, despite their audience popularity, did not enhance their cultural fitness and rendered them worthy of imitation only to a handful of filmmakers, even though there were occasional attempts at mainstreaming. *Dawn* was the only high-profile horror film from the period not followed by a mainstream imitator (cf. Kapsis 1992: 268). Only low-budget exploitation films copycatted *Dawn*: *Toxic Zombies* (1979), *Alien Dead* (1980), *Children* (1980), *Zombie Aftermath* (1981), *Night of the Zombies* (1981), and *Curse of the Cannibal Confederates* (1982), all catering to rapidly deteriorating regional markets that buoyed the cluster of zombie films discussed above (Thrower 2007, Tzioumakis 2006: 206). Variants still got produced, but zombie films increasingly followed the models set by *Night* and *Dawn*.[14] *Dawn*'s cut-rate imitators soured zombies as a genre devoid of any serious intent: bankable or artistic (Russell 2006: 151-160) and further hamstrung

[14] Some variants produced immediately after *Dawn* include: *Fiend* (1980), *Dawn of the Mummy* (1981), *Dead and Buried* (1981), *Evil Dead* (1981), *Kiss Daddy Goodbye* (1981), and *One Dark Night* (1982). None, however, identifies itself as a zombie film.

zombies with ratings problems (Gagne 1987: 148-150, *Variety* 1979a). Understanding the stream of events requires unpacking the unusual development of *Dawn.*

It all began in a mall. Searching for a way to extend *Night*'s story, a friend of George Romero – who happened to be a co-owner of the Monroeville Mall – gave him a tour of it. Romero remembers the occasion, "[h]is offices were at the mall, and one of the times I was out there, he gave me a tour. He showed me these crawl spaces up above and told me that people could probably survive up there, and I thought, *'Here It Is*!!!'" (emphasis in the original) (qtd. in Gagne 1987: 83). Getting an idea for a film is one thing, but procuring funding from the industry's gatekeepers is another (Hirsch 1972, Lobato and Ryan 2011, Nowell 2013). Romero's ah-ha moment occurred in 1975 when demonic possession horror films preoccupied the attention of major studios. Obtaining the estimated $1.5 million budget presented a significant hurdle, particularly for a director without a pickup in hand and a series of box-office busts in tow. Romero started writing *Dawn*'s script in 1976, completing half of it before going off to direct *Martin* (1987: 84) whose success partly reestablished Romero as a capable filmmaker (see Fallows and Owen 2008: 45-51, Gagne 1987: 71-81, Williams 2003: 74-83), but not enough to acquire the budget necessary for *Dawn* (Gagne 1987: 84; cf. Bielby and Bielby 1994, Hirsch 1972). By this time, Romero co-founded his own production company, Laurel Entertainment, Inc., with Richard Rubinstein. In a move telling as it is lucky, Irvin Shapiro, Laurel's foreign distribution agent, sent Italian producer Alfred Cuomo an incomplete copy of *Dawn*'s script. Cuomo translated the script into Italian and delivered to Dario Argento, a former film critic turned director who was a big fan of Romero and *Night*. Argento immediately put up half *Dawn*'s budget in agreement for its distribution

rights in non-English speaking parts of the world (except South America). Romero and Rubinstein cobbled together the remainder of *Dawn*'s funds from domestic investors, but had to supply substantial sums of their own money.

Before analyzing the influence of Romero and Argento's partnership in zombies' pyrrhic institutionalization, I further consider the decision to by Hollywood studios as a source of funding. When processing new trends culture industries act conservatively, making the capitalization of risky productions unlikely (see Dowd 2007, Peterson and Berger 1975, Peterson and Anand 2004: 316-317) unless conditions are just right (Nowell 2011a, 2013). With over-the-top gore written into *Dawn*'s script coupled with zombies' and Romero's lackluster track record, Laurel must have recognized that major studios would immediately balk at the film. Between the European and American release of *Dawn*, journalist Dale Pollock (1979: 1) noted as much, "[i]t was the fear on the part of major studios to handle a 'problem' pic like 'Dawn' that has scuttled previous studios from Romero." Then, as now, directors signed to studio contracts were obliged to deliver certain ratings for their films (King 2002; Lewis 2002; Sandler 2002, 2007), in the case of horror R-ratings (Nowell 2011a, 2011b; Sandler 2002: 213-214). Even with the period between 1978 and 1980 demonstrating more permissive attitudes toward film violence than the mid-1970s (Kapsis 1992: 269-270), *Dawn* was still too gory to deliver a reliable R-rating (Pollock 1979, 1980; Segers 1979; *Variety* 1979a, 1979b). Romero had to compromise or get lucky. He got lucky. Romero's deal with Argento gave Romero full creative control over *Dawn*'s content provided Argento could recut the film for foreign audiences. More good fortunes fell upon Romero when production commenced. The owners of the Monroeville Mall agreed to serve to serve as *Dawn*'s principle filming

location for the nominal fee of $40,000 and 130 of the mall's 143 stores gave permission to be featured in *Dawn* (Gagne 1987: 91). Filming and post-production also went well, but finding the distributor turned out being a nightmare.

In March 1978, Romero finished a rough cut of *Dawn* and sent it off to Argento in Italy. By September, *Dawn* received its Italian release as *Zombie* where it "zapped the wickets in five Italian key cities" (*Variety* 1978: 37) and sparked a cycle of Italian zombie films (O'Brien 2008). The American release – because of ratings issues – would not come until April 1979. In the eyes of Romero and Rubinstein there were two problems in submitting *Dawn* for a rating. First, all of *Dawn*'s violence destined it for an X-rating. Because of its association with pornography, X-ratings served as box office poison (*Los Angeles Times* 1971, Jones 1979). According to director/producer Bob Clark, "an X-rating is so tainted; it kills your film – no major will distribute it" (qtd. in Anderson 1982: 27). Even though Dale Pollock (1979: 1) reported on the willingness of two (undisclosed) majors to release *Dawn* with an X-rating, Romero and Rubinstein remained steadfast that releasing *Dawn* with an X-rating would kill its ticket sales (Gagne 1987: 97-98). In Romero's highly publicized argument with the Ratings Board, he declared the X-rating as "unsalable" (*Variety* 1979a: 37) because it was synonymous with smut. Romero lobbied for a new Adult (or A) rating to distinguish films intended for adults only, but lacked sexual content. Romero and Rubinstein's second problem was their conviction that cutting *Dawn* to get an R-rating would destroy it. In an interview with Dale Pollock (1979: 1) Romero explained that ratings board "played straight with us and told us we'd hurt the film if we cut it." Rubinstein stated likewise, "[t]hey admitted that if we were to cut the picture to satisfy their requirements for an R, it wouldn't be the

same picture that we made" (qtd. in Gagne 1987: 98). Warner Bros. and American International Pictures expressed interest in *Dawn,* but demanded an R-rating. Rubinstein clarified the rejection of lucrative distribution deals, "[w]hile we might get broader distribution, we felt that we wouldn't have a picture that people wanted to see. You really make money in this business not in the first week, but where a picture has played for a substantial period of time and people keep coming even through you've stopped advertising. I didn't feel that cutting the film would promote that kind of situation – there's a difference between getting wide distribution and making money" (qtd. in Gagne 1987: 98). While *Dawn* generated buzz in Europe (*Variety* 1978, Werba 1978), Romero and Rubinstein refused to sell it domestically until a distributor agreed to release it unrated.

Convinced of *Dawn*'s potential, United Film Distribution's Salah Hassanein offered to distribute *Dawn* as is. According to Rubinstein, United Film Distribution "actually offered us the lowest upfront cash … but they were willing to take the film as it was" (qtd. in Gagne 1987: 99). Even though released without a rating, promotion of *Dawn* clearly stated that no one under the age of seventeen would be admitted. Frank Segers (1979), however, learned of many exhibitors advertising *Dawn* as having an R-rating, creating a smattering of legal issues. Amidst controversy, *Dawn* grossed $30 million in worldwide rentals, its $16 million domestic box-office comparable to the year's other surprise hit, *Halloween* which grossed $18.5 million (Cohn 1980: 32). *Dawn* and *Halloween* were both independently distributed, but only *Halloween* spawned a high-profile cycle of similar films; *Dawn* resulted in a cycle of low-budget, low-profile, and unsuccessful spin-offs. The year 1979 was a promising one for horror films (Cohn 1980,

Kapsis 1992: 268), the success of which led to a three year boom-bust cycle (Cohn 1980, 1982, 1984; Harmetz 1979, 1980; Kapsis 1992: 2680269, 2009: 6-11; Nowell 2011a). In addition to slasher films Kapsis (1992: 268) posits, "other types of horror films went into production during this period (e.g. ghost stories, werewolf stories), reflecting the film industry's view that more traditional forms could be revived and rejuvenated by beefing up the violence and through startling special effects." With horror productions reaching all-time highs in 1980 and 1981 (Cohn 1982a, 1982b, 1984; Kapsis 1992: 268), why were there so few follow-ups to one year's most popular and successful horror films?

To re-emphasize, the transitional ecology of slashers won out not only because they could consistently deliver R-ratings (Nowell 2011a), but they also reliably attracted male and female teenagers (Dika 1987, Harmetz 1980, Nowell 2011a). More than half of horror film audiences were teenagers (Dika 1987: 87; Harmetz 1979; Nowell 2011a, 2011b), so obtaining R-ratings was of vital importance. X and unrated films, by definition could not admit teenagers, but they also faced additional disadvantages with many papers refusing to review them and many theaters refusing to exhibit them (Lewis 2002, Nowell 2011b: 33). Why not make an R-rated zombie film? Most of *Dawn*'s successors – *Toxic Zombies, Alien Dead, Children, Zombie Aftermath, Night of the Zombies,* and *Curse of the Cannibal Confederates* – received R-ratings, but none were successful. Filmmakers and industry gatekeepers could have interpreted the failures of *Dawn*'s offspring in a variety of ways. *Dawn*'s success may have been attributable to publicity garnered over its rating controversy, a tactic often evoked during the period (see Wyatt 2005). *Dawn*'s popularity may have stemmed from director George Romero, who was developing a reputation as an uncompromising filmmaker (Gagne 1987: 1-8, Williams 2003: 1-3,

Wood 2003: 85-119). Viewers may have been drawn to the novelty of *Dawn*'s violence as well (Gagne 1987: 149). Whatever the reason, there was no reinforcing hit to *Dawn* which Richard Nowell (2011a, 2013) insists is necessary to sparking a cycle of similar films. Moreover, Nowell (2011a, 2011b, 2011c) furthers that the filmmakers behind the slasher boom increased the salability of their films by deliberately hybridizing aspects of contemporaneous production trends (e.g. romance, screwball comedy, summer camp movies) to broaden their audiences. None of the zombie films following *Dawn* managed to tap into any mainstream trend; they were aimed solely at horror fans. Their efforts confirmed the un-salability of zombies in the eyes of Hollywood's interorganizational gatekeepers. As Hank Werba (1978: 40) observed shortly after *Dawn*'s Italian release, productions like *Dawn* posed "too much a mystery to be fashionable." After two consecutive box-office smashes (e.g. *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*) gatekeepers saw slashers as particularly salable (Nowell 2011a). Many low-budget filmmakers were even directed into the genre (Harmetz 1979). Robert Kapsis (2009: 8-9), for example, details how *Fear No Evil* (1981) started out as a love story and wound up a horror film when Avco Embassy determined the film could sell better by injecting slasher-like elements into it. According to director Frank La Loggia, "[h]orror films were doing very well and we were looking for a first project that our money people could get behind, and so we developed an idea for a horror fantasy, approached them with that, and were able to raise about a million dollars" (qtd. in Kapsis 2009, 8). By 1983, the slasher boom ran its course (Kapsis; Nowell 2011a, 2011d, 2012a) with no obvious successor (see Nowell 2011d, 2012a for an overview of horror trends between 1984 and 1985). The violence against

women in many slashers caused a general backlash against horror films (Kapsis 1992: 171-172) which winnowed production queues for the genre (Cohn 1984).

Within the boom-bust period, the ratings board cracked down on cinematic violence again (Kapsis 1992: 269-270), essentially transitioning zombies to low-rent exploitation filmmakers. Zombies, however, got another chance for a mainstream in 1985 with the releases of *Day of the Dead* (1985) and *Return of the Living Dead* (1985), both of which performed poorly (Platts forthcoming*a*). *Return of the Living Dead* made slightly more than $6 million, good enough for 61st place in *Variety*'s "Big Rental Films of '85" while *Day of the Dead* finished in 138th position, making only $2 million (*Variety* 1985: 65, 100). After the recession of the late-1960s and early-1970s, Hollywood learned the market could only support a finite number of films. When given an audition for a mainstream cycle, zombies failed and were pushed into the burgeoning video market (Russell 2006: 164-169) which is briefly discussed next chapter. Zombies subsequently became institutionalized for low-budget gore/horror fans. Occasionally a zombie film received mainstream release – *Serpent and the Rainbow* (1987), *Night of the Living Dead* (1990), *Dead Alive* (1993) – but zombies thrived on the shelves of video stores, reemerging in 2002 when *28 Days Later* (2002) and *Resident Evil* (2002) indicated a potential market for zombie films. Since then production of zombie films has spiked to unprecedented levels (Dendle 2007, 2012; Newitz 2009), but zombies are still low-budget creatures (Dendle 2012).

8.6 Conclusion

In 1999, *Night* was consecrated by the National Film Registry as a picture "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." *Night*'s evolution from a weirdie,

described last chapter, to the granddaddy of modern zombie films to a film important enough for preservation did not occur in the decade after its release. Rather, most filmmakers and studios ignored *Night* due to its provincial popularity and issues of violence. Other horror trends captured the attention of major studios while low-budget producers pursued their own market niches (i.e. opportunity spaces) as sculpted by regional exhibition practices. Zombies – still lacking a fixed ecology – mixed with the auspicial contexts of production to result in a cluster of zombie films that had very few commonalities. While horror increased in popularity, George Romero embarked to direct a sequel to *Night*. In a virtually unheard of production contract, Romero was given full creative control over the content of *Dawn*. Although containing obvious allegory, *Dawn*'s reliance on gore effects made it a problematic text (Pollock 1979). *Dawn* cemented zombie cinema's ecology, but *Dawn* was a text few would dare replicate with its high-profile skirmish with the ratings board. The viability and profitability of slasher films redirected the efforts of numerous low-budget filmmakers interested in horror. Only a handful of zombies received release in the wake of *Dawn*'s surprising popularity. Because *Dawn* established what zombie films should be, but was dangerous to reproduce, its institutionalization was pyrrhic. The next chapter discusses zombies' subsequent development in broad brushstrokes, taking zombies up to modern day before concluding the study.

Chapter 9 : Conclusion

9.1 Imagine a "Zombie" Scenario

Writing in 1986, film scholar Bruce Kawin ([1986] 2012) asked his readers to consider a variety of horror scenarios. Similar to way I started this study, when presenting a zombie scenario, Kawin ([1986] 2012) wrote, [i]magine that what is coming at you is a shuffling, gruesome unstoppable crowd of zombies; imagine they want to eat you and that they haven't brushed their teeth since before they died. Did you make up the details of the scene you're now imagining, or borrow them from memories of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)?" When asking readers to consider the situation, Kawin did not invite readers to imagine the very different scenarios of *White Zombie* (1932), *Creature with the Atom Brain* (1955), *Astro Zombies* (1968), or *Shanks* (1974). That Kawin, in 1986, should (rightly) assume readers would think of *Night of the Living Dead* and reflexively accept zombies as slow, gruesome, and anthropophagus demonstrates the institutional influence that a small group of texts exercised over zombies in a relatively short period of time. Indeed, just three years earlier, the basic ecological of zombies' new blueprint was parodied in the music video *Thriller* (1983), featuring Michael Jackson. *Thriller* shows zombies rising from their graves, stalking a teenage female, breaking into a barricaded house, and dancing with the King of Pop (see figure 9.1). So familiar were the canons of zombie narratives that Peter Dendle (2001: 8-10) identifies the mid-1980s as the "zombie spoof cycle" which included a number of self-referential, mostly straight-to-video films like *Bloodsuckers from Outer Space* (1984), *Hard Rock Zombies* (1984), *I Was a Teenage Zombie* (1986), *Redneck Zombies* (1987), and *Chopper Chicks in Zombietown* (1989), and headlined by *Return of the Living Dead* (1985) (see also Bishop

2010a: 181-187, Russell 2006: 151-160). Long considered a vital part of a genre's evolution, parody occurs in the late stage of development – for a review and critique see Gallagher (2012). Dan Harries (2002: 282) argues parodies unsheathe "a 'blueprint' of the targeted genre by laying bare the genre's structure and conventions." The convergence of Kawin's scholarship, Jackson's video, and low-budget spoofs in the mid-1980s suggests that what zombies are, how they should act, and how they should look was finally established. Zombies' ecology, for all intents and purposes, was cemented. Genres, of course, are never static. Creative liberties show up in nearly every genre film, but a firmer generic ecology keeps radical meanderings in check (cf. Grindon 2007, 2012; Neale 2012). In this study I have examined the conditions that informed the emergence, development, and establishment of the archetypical zombie narrative. In my conclusion, I will bring you up to date with zombie cinema by trading post-*Dawn of the Dead* (1978) zombie movies as processing through two distinct phases: a home video driven boom-bust phase (1980-2001) and a digital/internet boom (2002-present) that continues to today. I will then summarize and discuss the broader utility of my study and the model employed.

9.2 The Video Dead: Zombies in the Age of Home Video

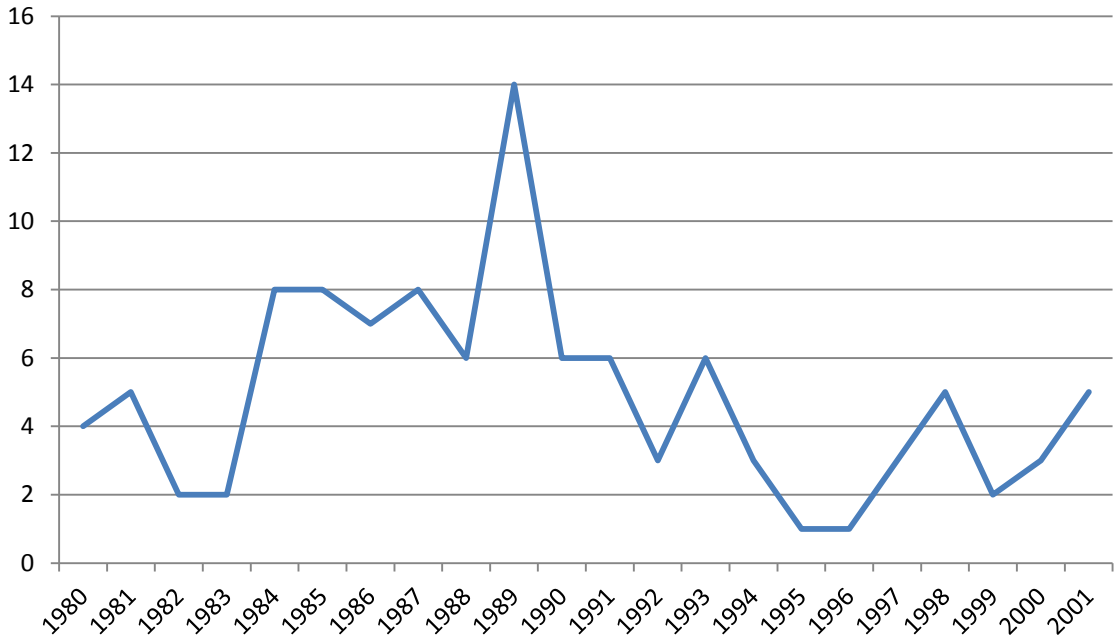
Because of reliance on reflectionist models, I contend the boom-bust period between from 1980-2001, depicted in the table below, remains one of the least understood phases of zombie cinema's history. Describing the ebbing of zombie films in the 1990s, Kyle Bishop (2010a: 15) notes "America in the 1990s settled perhaps into too much complacency and stability to warrant serious, classical zombie narratives." Treating zombie films (or any other genre for that matter) as solely reflective of exogenous

cultural drifts elides the productive apparatuses responsible for their creation (Nowell 2012b, 2013). Instead of pointing to a period of social contentment and relative security as explanation for zombie cinema's disappearance in the 1990s, I briefly point to two extra-industrial events that led to zombies' relatively precipitous rise and fall: the advent of the video market and the oligopolization of that market by Blockbuster Video.

Yannis Tzioumakis (2006: 206, 222) argues that the low-budget filmmaking discussed last chapter gradually matriculated into the video market as saturation releases of event films occupied more and more screen space. At first the major studios fought the legality of home video (for histories see Luckenbill 1995; Wasser 2001: 82-91; 2008: 122-123), allowing it to become province of independent filmmakers (Greenberg 2008: 81-96; Prince 2000a: 117-123; Wasser 2001: 104-130; 2008: 124-125). In a brief pocket of time, home video offered a boon for low-budget filmmakers of all genres (Ansen, McAlevey, and Ames 1987; Bierbaum 1986, 1990; Cohn 1990). VCR sales rapidly escalated through the early-1980s (Greenberg 2008: 77, Prince 2000a: 96, Wasser 2001: 68) as did the number of video stores (Seim 2001), causing sharp surges in low-end productions (Wasser 2001: 155). High demand for product from video store owners led to the erection of a small number of independent video labels catering to generic niches, particularly horror (Ansen, McAlevey, and Ames 1987). Companies like Academy Entertainment, Continental Video, Embassy Home Entertainment, Gorgon Video, Imperial Entertainment Corp., Key Video, Lightning Video, Media Home Entertainment, New World Video, Paragon Video, Simitar Entertainment, ThrillerVideo, Trans World Entertainment, Unicorn Video, Vestron, Vidmark Entertainment, Wizard Video, and

many others specialized in extremely low-budget horror films from the early-1980s to the mid-1990s.

Table 9.1: Zombie Films Produced in the United States, 1980-2001[15]



Stephen Prince (2000a: 117) posits "because of the sheer voraciousness of the public's appetite for movies, the need for product in this ancillary market helped produce a boom in the production and distribution of independent film" and "as a result of this bubble of opportunity, a wide array of significant directors and films became an enduring part of eighties film culture offering alternative styles and visions to the more traditional product handled by the majors." That is, the brief and fecund phase offered in the first stages of the video market led to a spike in zombie production during the 1980s. The closing of this opportunity space would lead to the decline of zombie cinema in the 1990s. Beginning in the late-1980s video retail stores began a period of consolidation

[15] In contrast to previous chapters, information for this table was compiled by the films listed in Peter Dendle's (2001) *Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* and the zombie film index included in Jamie Russell's (2006) *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema*.

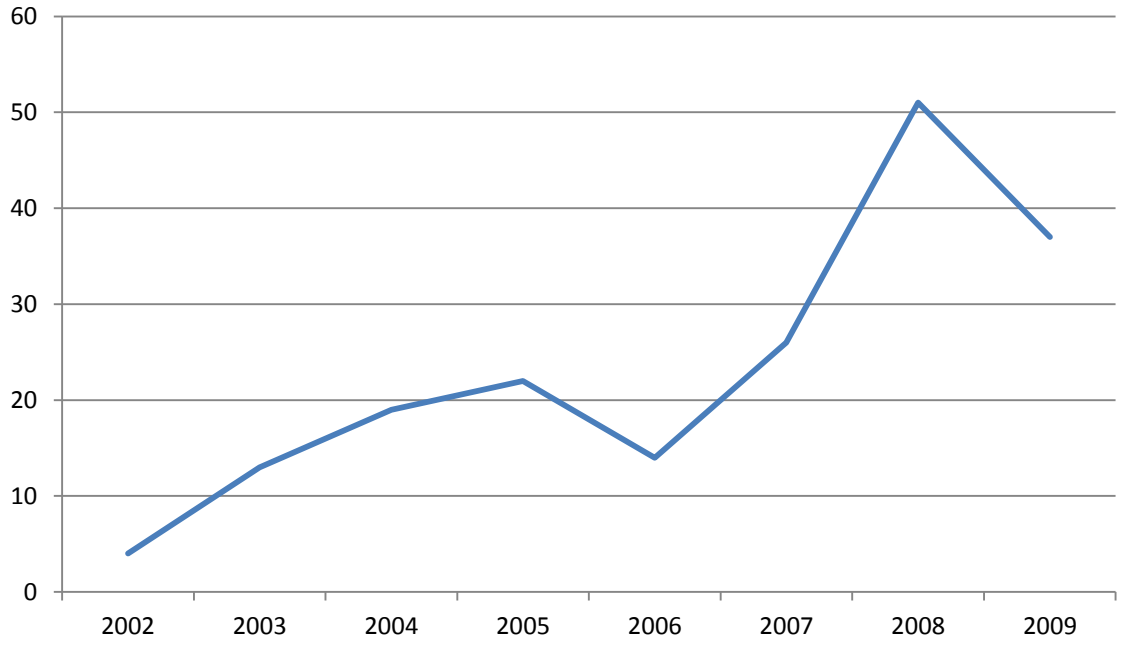
with Blockbuster Video leading the charge (Wasser 2001: 146-149). Likewise, Wal-Mart became the biggest sell-through (videos that are produced to be sold directly to the consumer) outlet in the United States by 1990 (Wasser 2001: 145, 2008: 127). Both retailers favored dealing with Hollywood studios over smaller labels that produced niche catered product. Wasser (2008: 127) explains "no independent producer/distributor tries to enter the video market without forming expensive alliances with a Hollywood studio that has the clout to deal with such retailers." Adding another barrier, Blockbuster often banned X-rated and other controversial titles (Wasser 2001: 147). Moreover, Blockbuster and other large retailers adopted a strategy of depth over breadth (Seim 2001, Wasser 2001: 149-151) wherein more copies single titles occupied more store space than fewer copies of more films. Wal-Mart and Blockbuster's tactics had the effect of not only squeezing independent video retailers, but also the small straight-to-video companies that produced many of the zombie films in the 1980s. Zombie films nearly disappeared in the late-1990s because there were too few retailers to reliably distribute them. Indeed, few of the straight-to-video labels from the 1980s and 1990s exist today. As Janet Wasko (1994: 249-252) observed video did not enhance competition; it simply allowed the big to get bigger.

9.3 The Rise of the DVD: Digital Versatile Dead

When the 2000s proved a watershed period for zombies, Peter Dendle (2012: 1) proclaimed "the resurrection of the zombie on screen in the 2000s came as a surprise to everyone" (see table 9.2). Most commentators link this sudden rise of zombie productions witnessed since 2002 to a registration of post-9/11 paranoiac mentalité (see Bishop 2009, 2010a: 191-196; Beale 2004; Dziemianowicz 2009; Flint 2009; Muntean and Payne

2009; Newitz 2009; St. John 2006). Along these lines Kyle Bishop (2009, 18) observes, "Because the affereffects of war, terrorism, and natural disasters so closely resemble the scenarios of zombie cinema … [they have] all the more power to shock and terrify a population that has become otherwise jaded by more traditional horror films."

Table 9.2: Zombie Films Produced in the United States, 2002 to 2009[16]



Scholars and commentators argue that not only have the events of 9/11 sparked a zombie renaissance, but have recalibrated the calculus of the monster. The major difference between "new zombies" and "Romero-influenced zombies" Kyle Bishop (2009: 24) argues, is that most twenty-first-century zombies are faster, more deadly, and symbolically more transparent" (see also Birch-Bayley 2012, Muntean and Payne 2009). Though fast zombies are more frequent that in past zombie films, slow zombies are still the norm. Fast zombies are but a minor variation on the ecological model first suggested by *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*. Additionally, as briefly highlighted

[16] Tabulations are based on my own estimates as informed by searches on the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com) and the Zombie Media Database (zmdb.org).

in the introduction, zombies' political constitution has been slightly altered in the post-9/11 auspice. Where many read the nihilism of Romero's films as progressive because society must collapse and start anew to rectify its social problems, numerous scholars argue post-9/11 zombie films exhibit progressiveness, ambivalence, and reactionary sentiment insofar as some zombie films like *28 Days Later* (2002) maintain the integrity and authority of patriarchal structures in solving the problem of the zombie menace, upholding the paternalist mentalité of combating terrorism (Birch-Bayley 2012; Bishop 2009; Dendle 2011, 2012; Muntean and Payne 2009). While many point to the events of 9/11 as explanation for the rise of zombie popular culture, Peter Dendle (2012: 7-8) notices: "[i]mages of destruction, plague, and civil collapse are especially poignant in the post-9/11 world, and it's tempting to think of the zombie movie resurgence in the 2000s as a response to that event. But *28 Days Later* was mostly shot before the attacks on the Twin Towers, and *Resident Evil* had been in the works since 1999." Dendle (2012), in his admittedly nonsystematic analysis of nearly 300 zombie films produced between 2000 and 2010, also observes that explicit references are rare. Downplaying direct links between 9/11 and the current flux of zombie cinema Dendle (2012: 8) also notes, "if a number of zombie started to appear in 2002 and 2003, that means that many of them had been in the works for quite a while. In any event none of those early movies deal explicitly with 9/11 anxieties." In fact, many of the elements said to correspond to post-9/11 anxieties were already built into the genre (Bishop 2009, Dendle 2012, Muntean and Payne 2009: 243). Changes in the systems of production lie behind zombies' newfound popularity (cf. Anderson 2008, Lobato and Ryan 2011, Ryan and Hughes 2006). Peter Dendle (2012: 1-2) writes the current rush of zombie movies "would not receive wide-

scale distribution: the titles would never be picked up by Netflix or Amazon Instant Video or retail DVD companies. But independent film distributors leap on zombie movies in a heartbeat, because they know there's a ready market." Dendle (2012: 4) also posits, "one of the hallmarks of the twenty-first century zombie is the proliferation of diverse media and narrative formats." As Christine Parker director of *Fistful of Brains* (2008) revealed, "I would like to do something other than zombie movies right now but our fans are demanding more zombie movies so we'll keep making them" (qtd. in *Dead Harvey*). George Romero, I think, pinpoints the rationale for why major studios have recently released a cycle of zombie films that includes *28 Days Later*, the *Resident Evil Series* (2002-present), *Dawn of the Dead, Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Zombieland* (2009), and *Zombieland 2* (in-production) among others, "[i]f one horror films hits, everyone says, 'Let's go make a horror film.' It's a genre that never dies" (qtd. in Beale 2004: 4). Romero also proclaimed that the popularity of a number of zombie films woke everyone up. Also significant to zombies' reemergence are the low-budget distribution described by Lobato and Ryan (2011) and Ryan (2010) that allow virtually any zombie film to find an enough of an audience to be profitable. Entire culture industries now produce, with dizzying frequency, movies, comics, novels, and video games featuring zombies. Additionally, individuals routinely don complex homemade zombie costumes to march in zombie walks and/or engage in roleplaying games like Humans vs. Zombies. This is not to mention other zombie related merchandise (e.g. t-shirts, coffee mugs, mouse pads, toys, bumper stickers, etc.), music (e.g. The Zombies, Evenings in Quarantine: The Zombie Opera), and fansites (e.g. allthingszombie.com, zmdb.org). The sum total of zombie popular now delivers an estimated $5 billion to the world economy. While

zombies' current popularity will likely wane, zombies exhibit enough plasticity and durability to survive well into the future.

9.4 Lessons and Summary

In combining insights from reflection traditions, production studies, and endogenous orientations to cultural change, I hope to have illustrated the processes of how new cultural objects emerge, evolve, expand, and contract. By treating the development of zombie cinema as progressing through a series of distinct phases, I have shown how generic forms evolve through the coconstitutive forces of the material and temporal auspices of production, opportunity spaces available to producers, and the processially determined endogenous genre ecology that tethers experimentation with certain cultural expressions. My study illuminated how zombie cinema was influenced and shaped by contemporaneous social events (e.g. the occupation of Haiti, the Cold War, countercultural movements, etc.), production trends (e.g. unit-production, teenpics, weirdies, blockbusterization, straight-to-video market, etc.), filmmaking conditions (e.g. censorship standards, market conditions, salability of horror, etc.), and understanding of the zombie itself (e.g. from Haitian boogeyman to flesheating ghoul).

I began the study by clarifying the genesis of zombie cinema. Where other studies rightly point to xenophobic curiosities as explanation for the advent of the genre, I located the zombie's genesis as opportunistic attempt to cash-in on the early-1930s horror cycle that exclusively featured European monsters. I then argued that the zombie was ill-suited to the productive rationales of Hollywood's major studios. *White Zombie*'s successful formula, lacking studio development, opened an opportunity space for Poverty Row studios to exploit the creature. Though Poverty Row produced zombie-centric

zombie films, they took liberties with the monster that would have been unacceptable to other monsters. Likewise, because the zombie was so ill-defined reviewers placed it in several films that were not produced or advertised as such. The twisting and contorted of the zombie continued into the 1950s. By this time, productive practices were radically altered as a result of the 1948 Paramount antitrust case. This situation was complicated by the fact that many Americans stopped going to the movies as a leisure activity. Films increasingly catered to the remaining audience, teenagers. Shifts in production practices intersected with the loose ecology of the zombie to produce three cycles of zombie films that corresponded to a series of coeval trends. For all its supposed ingenuity, I argued that *Night of the Living Dead* was actually part of these trends. Contra the majority of zombie studies, I demonstrated that *Night of the Living Dead* did not single handedly reinvent the genre. The changes it introduced to the zombie narrative went largely unheeded for nearly one decade. Instead, it was *Dawn of the Dead* that established the zombie's modern ecology. However, controversies surrounding the text preempted immediate mainstream speculation into the genre. This caused the genre to become the province of the burgeoning video market where it wallowed for most of the 1980s and 1990s until the simultaneous success of *Resident Evil* and *28 Days Later* signaled the salability of zombies to the culture industries.

To account for the conditions which shaped the evolution of zombie cinema, I presented and applied a series of sensitizing concepts that link disparate fields of research on the sociology of culture together. The model captured the contours of the distinct phases of zombie cinema's evolution. Applying this model to zombie films shed light new on how the genre developed. Where it was commonly assumed that zombies serve as

"barometers of cultural anxiety" (Dendle 2007: 45), I showed that zombies do not necessarily provide an index of extant anxieties that they reflect the contours of industry more. Examinations of the zombie films briefly considered in this chapter will provide researchers a new set of challenges as they occurred against the backdrop of industrial landscapes that were thoroughly reshaped by conglomeration, globalization, synergy, the rapid expansion of home video and, an increased reliance upon ancillary markets (see especially Balio 1998, 2002; Epstein 2006, 2010; Miller et al. 2005). These studies must address the impact of national and transnational developments in order to account for the production of numerous cross-national co-productions (Lobato 2012, Lobato and Ryan 2011, Morris 2004).

On a broader level, it is a matter of bewilderment that sociology should have so little to say about the cinematic industries. As some of the oldest, largest, most enduring, wide-reaching, and influential cultural producing industries they warrant sociological attention. Sociology – as a discipline designed to unearth the influences of economic, political, institutional, and social forces – is ideally equipped to unsheathe the broader significance of the film industries (cf. Dowd 1999, Sutherland and Feltey 2012, Tudor 2000). This study has partly addressed this disciplinary lacuna by applying traditions built-up in other sociology of culture studies. In so doing, I hope this study has added new perspective to old debates and new mechanisms to deal with future ones.

Filmography (Primary Films)

Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. 1953. Dir. Charles Lamont.

Astro Zombies. 1968. Dir. Ted V. Mikel.

Blood of Ghastly Horror. 1972. Dir. Al Adamson.

Blood of the Zombie. 1961. Dir. Barry Mahon.

Blue Sunshine. 1978. Dir. Jeff Lieberman.

Cape Canaveral Monsters. 1960. Dir. Phil Tucker.

Child. 1977. Dir. Robert Voskanian.

Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things. 1973. Dir. Bob Clark.

Creature of the Atom Brain. 1955. Dir. Edward L. Cahn.

Dawn of the Dead. 1978. Dir. George A. Romero.

Dead Don't Die. 1975. Dir. Curtis Harrington.

Deathdream. 1974. Dir. Bob Clark.

Face of Marble. 1946. Dir. William Beaudine.

First Man Into Space. 1959. Dir. Robert Day.

Frozen Scream. 1975. Dir. Frank Roach.

Garden of the Dead. 1972. Dir. John Hayes.

Ghost Breakers. 1940. Dir. George Marshall.

Horror of Party Beach. 1964. Dir. Del Tenney.

House of Seven Corpses. 1974. Dir. Paul Harrison.

House on Skull Mountain. 1974. Dir. Ron Honthaner.

I Eat Your Skin. 1964. Dir. Del Tenney.

I Walked with a Zombie. 1943. Dir. Jacques Tourneur.

Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Become Mixed-Up Zombies. 1964. Dir.
Ray Dennis Steckler.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers. 1956. Dir. Don Siegel.

Invisible Invaders. 1959. Dir. Edward L. Cahn.

Isle of the Dead. 1945. Dir. Mark Robson.

King of the Zombies. 1941. Dir. Jean Yarbrough.

Last Man on Earth. 1964. Dir. Ubaldo Ragona.

Let's Scare Jessica to Death. 1971. Dir. John D. Hancock.

Love Wanga. 1936. Dir. George Terwilliger.

Messiah of Evil. 1973. Dir. Willard Huyck.

Monstrosity. 1963. Dir. Joseph V. Mascelli.

Night of the Living Dead. 1968. Dir. George A. Romero.

Orgy of the Dead. 1965. Dir. Edward D. Wood Jr.

Plan 9 from Outer Space. 1959. Dir. Edward D. Wood Jr.

Return of Dr. X. 1939. Dir. Vincent Sherman.

Revenge of the Zombies. 1943. Dir. Steve Sekely.

Revolt of the Zombies. 1936. Dir. Victor Halperin.

Shanks. 1974. Dir. William Castle.

Shock Waves. 1977. Dir. Ken Wiederhorn.

Sugar Hill. 1974. Dir. Paul Maslansky.

Teenage Zombies. 1959. Dir. Jerry Warren.

Unearthly. 1957. Dir. Boris Petroff.

Valley of the Zombies. 1946. Dir. Philip Ford.

Voodoo Island. 1957. Dir. William Le Borg.

Voodoo Man. 1944. Dir. William Beaudine.

Walking Dead. 1936. Dir. Michael Curtiz.

White Zombie. 1932. Dir. Victor Halperin.

Zombies of Mora Tau. 1957. Dir. Edward L. Cahn.

Zombies on Broadway. 1945. Dir. Gordon Douglas.

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VITA

Todd Platts is from York, Pennsylvania. Not straying too far from home, he received his BS in sociology from York College of Pennsylvania in 2003. He then moved to Athens, Ohio where he earned an MA in sociology from Ohio University in 2006, during which time he worked in one of the haunted buildings in the United States (his work was not related to the paranormal, however). Todd then moved once more; this time to Columbia, Missouri to begin work on his PhD in sociology, yet again, at the University of Missouri. To this day, Todd cannot adequately explain what possessed him to undertake research in zombies. Outside the sociology of zombies, Todd is also interested constructions of race and racism, media sociology, the sociology of popular culture, and other topics that elude neat categorizations. He has forgotten what he enjoys in his spare time.