

**"Born in Death": Media and Identity in Post-War
American and Global Fictions of the Undead**

Jonathan Mark Wilkinson

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Abstract

Existing scholarship has largely overlooked that the undead are, famously, ‘us’. They are beings born from our deaths. Accordingly, their existence complicates the limits and value of our own. In this dissertation, I therefore argue that fictions of the undead reflect on questions of identity, meditating on the ways in which identities are created, distorted or otherwise reformed by the media to which their most important texts draw insistent attention. Analysing landmark texts from Post-War American contexts, this dissertation expands its hypothesis through three case studies, reading the texts in each as their own exercise in ontological thought. In each case study, I show that fictions of the undead reflect on the interactions between media and identity. However, there is no repeating model through which the themes of media, identity and undeath are repeatedly engaged. Each text’s formulation of these interacting themes is distinct to the other’s, suggesting that the significance of the undead and their respective tradition is not in the resounding ontological ‘answers’ that they and their texts inspire, but the questions that their problematic existential state asks.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Chapter 1

Introduction

‘A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever.’

(Matheson, *Legend* 161)

In their century-long existence, the undead have carved out a significant place in Western popular culture. Holding stakes in most popular artistic traditions, they have so successfully infiltrated the collective imagination that few could claim not to know of them and their kind. However, for all their popularity, the undead have yet to be studied in any great detail: for whilst they have attracted critical attention, it has generally been for their contribution to the traditions of the vampire and the zombie.¹ Although these traditions overlap with the undead at numerous junctures and share between them a host of key texts, the undead are not an amalgam of the two. They have a genealogy in and of themselves, a history independent of the vampire and the zombie with which they are often equated. Born in death, as Richard Matheson has put it, the undead are at once us and yet not us; and here, at the hinterlands of ourselves, *their* existence, if we can use that term, questions the limits of our own. Fictions of the undead are always therefore explorations of identity. They call into question who or what a subject ‘is’, and this ontological reflexivity is paired with the attention they pay to the media within which they circulate.

Characteristically populated by a range of media technologies, fictions of the undead remind us that media are always *remediations*,² one medium oscillating into another through a process that is itself a form of undeath, and this undeathly quality is doubly enacted as and in these fictions. At an extratextual level, this remediative logic explains the undead’s cultural identity as a life lived between the vampire, the zombie and the infected. Whilst within these

¹ For an overview of the well documented and diverse history of the vampire, see Beresford *From Demons to Dracula*, Auerbach *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Frayling *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula* and Stuart, *Stage Blood: Vampires of the 19th Century Stage*. For overviews of the history of the Zombie in fiction, see Christie and Lauro, *Better off Dead*, and McIntosh and Leverette, *Zombie Culture*; and see Zora Neale Hurston *Tell My Horse* for an overview of the Haitian and Jamaican origins of the zombie myth.

² See Bolter and Grusin.

fictions, media's undeathliness is figured in the representation of lives mediated by media: identities inflected, reconstructed, or deformed by the media technologies that circulate their fictional worlds. It is my contention that this connection between media and identity has been a latent feature of fictions of the undead since their beginnings in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. However, it is a relationship that only fully unfurls in the latter half of the twentieth century, when the undead are released from their historical partnership with the vampire and begin new partnerships with post-war American and global media technologies.

In an analysis of the zombie, Boon details the evolving etymology of the term 'monster' as follows:

Its Old and middle French (*mostre* and *monstre*, respectively), and Anglo-Norman derivations articulate disfiguration of the human form, and the term's evolution from classical Latin (*monstrum*) through Italian (*mostro*), Spanish (*mostro*), and Portuguese (*monstro*) imply a warning (from base *monere* – to warn) embodied in the monstrous form. Thus, the etymological roots of the monstrous imply a boundary space between human and non-human (originally, human and animal) – the imaginary region that lies between being and non-being, presence and absence. (33)

From an etymological perspective the monster is a warning carved into flesh. Continuing, Boon argues that '[t]hat which is defined as "monstrous"' is that which 'was not supposed to happen' (34). It is a deviation or aberration on the human whose difference opens up a dialectic of self and other that defines that which the human is and should be by antithesis of that which it should not.

This allegorical understanding of the monster is common to both Gothic studies and, more specifically, analyses of the undead. It is most popularly championed by Judith Halberstam, who argues that 'Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known' (2) – a deviance she marks is represented in the monster's deformed skin.

Turning her attention to Stoker's *Dracula*, she argues that its monster 'is a composite of otherness that manifests as the horror essential to dark, foreign, and perverse bodies' (90). She notes that 'Dracula ... resembles the Jew of [contemporary] anti-Semitic discourse', and that his 'his physiognomy ... is a particularly clear cipher for the specificity of his ethnic monstrosity' (92): a monstrous aspect which, she adds, was 'also seen to express ... criminality and degeneration' (93). Contemporary anxieties surrounding degeneration and

Judaism are thus conjoined in *Dracula*, a social parasite who drains the health and wealth of his host-country and its citizens by the power of his two protruding teeth, markers of his deformity.

Mighall has contested this ‘anxiety model’ approach and its tendency to read a text’s ‘anxious’ content in terms of the ‘anxieties’ of its context. In doing so, he has also turned his attention toward the undead, focusing again on Stoker’s *Dracula* and again on the tendency to equate its monsters with contemporary anxieties surrounding degeneration. Halberstam’s analysis is one such example; however, I will use Kane’s “Insiders/Outsiders” as a more developed and typical example of this thought.³

Kane argues that *Dracula* is an attempt to ‘overcome a whole complex of phenomenon’(21) related to ‘Darwinist-inspired fears regarding physical, mental, sexual, and racial degeneration’(4) by ‘project[ing] these fears onto one, clearly distinct, scapegoat’(21) in the shape of the Count; his invasion and expulsion played out to first situate that which was perceived to ail the nation as foreign and then to prescribe a ‘cure [for] the nation[’s] ... diseases’(17).

In contrast, Mighall contends that: ‘[t]hat scientists, pathologists, or sexologists had recourse to these devices, and that later Gothicists may have reciprocated by giving their own use of them distinct physiological or somatic inflection, does not necessarily suggest that they feared the same thing or anything at all’. Rather, he continues, ‘[w]hat it suggests is that both scientists and novelists belonged to a linguistic as well as a ‘class’ community’(181).

Reading *Dracula* in terms of a more nuanced history of the changing scientific and social industry that surrounded its production, Mighall argues that the thematic of degeneration as it appears in *Dracula* is not necessarily linked to a *fear* of the degenerate. In contrast he argues that the representation of *Dracula* as degenerate is a way to *assuage* the fear that *Dracula* represents as a supernatural monster (216-217). I will return to this analysis in greater detail later in this introductory chapter, but its significance at this juncture is that by

³ Kane’s account is representative of an extensive critical industry relating *Dracula* to a late Victorian anxiety of degeneration. Warren argues that ‘[i]n evoking fears of racial weakness and vulnerability to racially powerful people, the novel ... was part of a much larger cultural obsession with racial degeneration and imperial decline in the late Victorian era’(1127). According to McKee, ‘Stoker’s travellers ... pose two possibilities of racial degeneration of concern to late Victorians: that the Englishman abroad will be absorbed into an alien and primitive culture because of his own internal weaknesses; or that a stronger, more primitive race will invade from without and assimilate the English’(45). Whilst, in a manner almost identical to Kane, Pick argues that ‘[p]art of the novel’s task was to represent, externalise and kill off a distinct constellation of contemporary fears. Corruption and degeneration, the reader discovers, are identifiable, foreign and superable’(13).

side-lining analytical convention Mighall unlocks new significance of an otherwise critically worn text.

In this dissertation, I will borrow my theoretical thrust from Mighall in turning away from the now conventional ‘anxiety model’ formula. I will reason that fictions of the undead might be legible in terms of the anxieties of their more obvious social, political and historical contexts, but they are not therefore locked into them.⁴ Instead I argue that, while the exoteric markers of their monsters’ deformed flesh might allegorise contextual anxieties, the defining feature of their defining monster – undeath – is decidedly introspective and so therefore is their significance.

‘Un-death’ is a semiotic conundrum. The compound of a known English word with a stable meaning as modified by a standard Latin prefix, the term ‘undead’ suggests that what the undead are can be reasoned in relation to other known states of being. The Latin prefix un- ‘express[es] negation’ (“un-, prefix 1.”) and it is reasonable therefore to allow that undeath is that opposed to death. However, it cannot be concluded that undeath is a direct and complete reversal of death, a coming back to life, because notwithstanding that the established antonym of death is “life”, there is no complementary processes through which one can ‘un-die’.

I suggest that the undead are not really ‘un-dead’ at all. The undead are that into which the human becomes. They are beings born from our deaths; but this life, which begins at the termination of another’s, as do ours begin at the demise of our own gametous predecessors, is nevertheless theirs as is ours our own. If this life is labelled ‘undeath’ it is because it is imperfectly reconciled with the life-death binary in terms of which ours is commonly understood. The semiotic conundrum that is ‘un-death’ points to the implications that *their* life has on the limits and values of our own.

Born in death, the undead are literally *post*-human – part of a growing tendency to think beyond the human and the anthropocentric values of humanist thought. Hayles outlines a post-humanist manifesto as follows:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers

⁴ Although I will not analyse the undead as allegories specific to the more obvious *anxieties* of their contexts, I will nevertheless return to other, mostly technological, contexts in which these texts were produced.

consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. (2-3)

The undead, who either mutilate the human body or else usurp it as their own, are dramatic incarnations of this post-human sentiment. They are therefore a useful metric for thinking about the significance of life beyond the human and outside of anthropocentric avenues of thought; however, *their* life will not receive this much needed attention here. Rather than focus on the direct significance of *their* post-human construction, I will focus instead on the significance it bears on their human remainder. ‘Anything saddled with a “post” in its name is irretrievably caught up in whatever it is that it is “post- ing,” so it becomes nearly impossible to discuss post-humanism without engaging in a discussion of the relative pros and cons of humanism’ (Christie 77). By definition, post-humanism defines humanism, and by extension the post-human defines the human.

Similar lines of enquiry have been opened up in several critical studies. In Christie and Lauro’s *Better off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* it is argued that the zombie is an ‘apt icon for the post-human in its frustrating antipathy’, because ‘[j]ust as the post-human will always assert what the human is by that which it supposes itself to be beyond, the zombie both is, and is not, dead and alive’ (2). Through an eclectic mix of analyses that chart the zombie’s evolution from Haitian myth to popular-culture, the study ‘question[s] whether the zombie resembles our prehistoric past, acts as a mirror reflecting our present anxieties, or suggests whether the future will house a more evolved post-humanity or merely the graves of a failed civilization’ (2).

In *The Living and the Undead*, Waller also suggests that the undead are ‘always defined and depicted in relation to those human beings who become its victims or allies or antagonists. In short, the undead, as Van Helsing insists, must be understood in the context of the living, even when such monstrous creatures seem to be the antithesis of what we deem to be human’ (5). Extrapolating, he argues that the ‘confrontation between the living and the

undead insist[s] that we take into account not only the identity of the hunter and the victim, but also the relationship between the hunter, the victim, and the status quo, with its sanctioned authorities and its hallowed institutions' (15), considering how this relationship between the living and the undead 'explore[s] the nature of the status quo and the relationship between the public and the private, civic duty and personal desire' (15).

However, it is Mohammed and Greene's popular-cultural study, *The Undead and Philosophy*, which has the greatest bearing on my theoretical trajectory. The study uses the undead to explore and challenge the western philosophical canon and as a popular cultural barometer through which to gauge popular thought. Of particular interest to the direction of this dissertation are the case studies produced for this work by Larkin and Barrows, each of which read the undead into ontological theories and debates.

Reading *Dracula* in terms of Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology, Barrows argues that 'Stoker's greatest innovation ... was his use of the vampire story to explore deeper metaphysical questions about the true nature of humanity' (69). Heidegger proposed that '[d]eath in the widest sense is a phenomenon of life' (Heidegger qtd. in Greaves 111), that it makes of us 'authentic beings' in that our lives are defined in reference to their corresponding deaths. Accordingly, he theorises that if characters in the novel fear undeath, it is not only because of the 'physical grotesqueries and violence of blood-sucking, but ... the far more troubling psychological fear of becoming "false," of having one's death, a fundamental part of one's natural being, taken away, leaving the core of "true" humanity encased in a pallid deathless shell of skin and bone' (71).

In a similar fashion, Larkin argues that '[i]t is not a simple fear of death that a good zombie film exploits. It is not even the horror of being eaten that accounts for what scares us the most about the walking dead. It is rather our fear of being turned into one of them. In addition to our fear of dying and our fear of being eaten, there is our fear of becoming a zombie' (20). To fear the zombie, therefore, 'we must that we would *become* zombies' (20); that as our bodies pass through life to undeath who we are remains with it. Accordingly, Larkin argues that the undead intervene in the canonical philosophical debate of the mind-body problem.

The mind-body problem is most famously associated with the work of Rene Descartes and questions whether the continuation of the mind or the body constitutes the continuation of a person: whether we are '*res cogitans* – a thinking thing, a certain kind of mind' defined by our continued psychology; or '*res corporealis* – a bodily thing, a certain kind of material object' (Larkin 16) defined by the continued existence of our bodies. Fictions of the undead

raise this question by imagining a person whose body continues where their psychology does not, and as Larkin points out, they draw insistent attention to this debate through two tropes: through characters who would rather die than become ‘one of them’ (19-20), and the tragedy ‘that it is the very same individuals who were once our neighbors that are now out to gnaw on our entrails’ (22).

Both, Larkin argues, ‘reveal[] our deep-seated intuition that creatures like us could become zombies’; and ‘if it is possible for a person to become a zombie, then a person must be able to survive death’ (20). Else ‘it would not be our friends and neighbors [or ourselves] that rise from the dead with a taste for human flesh’ (22): there would be no cause to fear ‘becoming’ undead and no reason to remorse the destruction of our zombified friends and relatives. Thus, ‘deep down we must believe that people can survive as corpses’ (22).

However, Larkin does not account for the literary and cinematic significance of the tropes he analyses. They do establish a connection between the undead and the person in whose death they are born, but only to the extent that one is mistaken for the other to dramatic effect. To expand by example, I turn to a scene from Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later*. Here, as a child watches her father transform into one of the film’s infected she repeatedly calls him ‘dad’: ‘dad are you alright? dad ... dad ... dad? dad? dad?’ She identifies the undead before her as her father, but it does not therefore follow that he is. The horror of this scene is not in a father intent on harming his daughter, but a daughter who cannot see, or bear to see, that the body she once knew as her father’s has become home to something else.

The undead’s literally post-human construction subverts the significance assigned to bodies as it makes of them a palimpsest, and as it does so it questions the limits and value of its transient inhabitants. Who or what are ‘we’ if we can be so easily erased and rewritten? It is around this interrogative offshoot that I locate a central tenant of this dissertation’s enquiry, being that fictions of the undead explore notions of identity.

Identity is an ambiguous term, and I will take the time here to consider its potential significance and clarify the manner in which the term is employed throughout this dissertation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines identity as ‘[t]he sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition of being a single individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality’ (“identity, n.”). It is in this sense of the word that it will be used here. In other terms, identity here is defined as that which makes us ‘us’, and that distinguishes this ‘us’ from the ‘them’ into which the undead threaten we will become.

As I have just reasoned, fictions of the undead suggest that a person is a *res cogitans* – defined by their psychological continuity. My understanding of identity in the context of these texts is perhaps therefore necessarily orientated towards identity as a psychological phenomenon. Nevertheless, the term will not take a wholly stable value as rooted in any single theoretical context as it is used throughout this dissertation.

Instead, identity will be a variable of this study. What identity is, how we come to have it and how it might be lost will depend on each text under analysis: where they draw the dividing line between the living and the undead and the ways in which they do so. In each of my case studies I will argue that, in response to the destabilising impetus of the undead's post-human construction, fictions of the undead do their own philosophical work. By performing close readings of seminal texts, I will show that they reflect on what it is to be 'us', and as I will momentarily make apparent, they insistently return this reflection to the ways in which who we 'are' is formed through and even as the popular media forms of our times.

Stoker's *Dracula* is perhaps necessarily the point of departure for this argument. The text has amassed an extensive critical following, and a large portion of this critical attention has sought to explore how Dracula and his vampiric caste allegorize an exhaustive repertoire of contemporary issues: unbridled sexuality (Kane); the distortion of traditional gendered roles (Craft); reverse-colonization (Kane; Arata); the roguish activities of undertakers (Scandura); degeneration (Kane; Warren; McKee; Pick); incest and exogamy (Kane; Stevenson); and the corruption of white 'stock' (on the questionable assertion that Dracula is 'black' – McKee). However, beyond these anxiety model critiques, the novel clearly invites a consideration of the matters I have just discussed.

This is most evident through the presence of the tropes that Larkin has identified and which can be read into the mind-body problem. Jonathan attempts to scale the sheer surface of Dracula's castle rather than become a victim of his vampiric disease; Mina begs Jonathan that 'should the time come, you will kill me' (275); and the vampire-hunting 'Crew of Light' make a similar decision on an already vamped Mina's behalf, her execution speckled with hesitation and doubt. Stoker's *Dracula* opens up the vampire's literary potential by showing characters who, when threatened with undeath, reflect on the significance of their lives, and it opens up this potential in a world fascinated with media, its story told through an elaborate network of metatextual accounts.

Wicke has argued that the media through which the text is fictionally recorded mirrors the productive capacities of its vampires. The text's metafictional accounts, she reminds us, are

not only media products, but the products of processes of mediation that occur within the text itself:

[a] narrative patchwork made up out of the combined journal entries, letters, professional records and newspaper clippings that the doughty band of vampire hunters had separately written or collected, it is then collated and typed by the industrious Mina, wife of the first vampire target and ultimately a quasi-vampire herself. (Wicke 469)

As we read it, the text is composed of ‘hardly one authentic document’ (Stoker 315). It is composed of media texts that have been variously translated and compiled by the (re)productive capacities of Mina’s typewriter, which in a fit of vampirism feeds on one media in the production of another, and then goes on to falsely signify as that which it has consumed.⁵

Mina’s ‘vampiric’ typewriting is therefore an exercise in remediation. It is the representation of one medium within another: phonograph recordings, shorthand diary entries, newspaper clippings, all re-presented in the text’s final, novelistic form. Representation, however, is a key word, for this process is not a transposition but a translation. It is attended with a degree of interpretation, a distortion and creation of value. Wicke has asked, ‘[w]hat, after all, is the stenographic version of “kiss me with those red lips,” Jonathan’s hot inner monologue as he lies swooning on the couch surrounded by his version of Dracula’s angels’ (471), and the series of remediative exchanges underlying this one phrase is insightful. As Wicke implies, something has been both lost and gained in Mina’s translation: expressed in the bureaucratic language of shorthand, Jonathan’s sexual loaded imagery attains a certain peculiarity, but it also loses sensibility. In the text, shorthand is used by Jonathan for the very specific reason that it has value in its codified form, that it is inaccessible to the Count. Thus, when transcoded by Mina, it is at once made sensible, but also accessible. At once it gains value and loses it: it gains legibility but loses secrecy; it gains sexual potency but loses its bureaucratic peculiarity – the official form of which might have been a crucial part of Jonathan’s clandestine fantasy all along. What this demonstrates is that the remediative processes that underlie the text’s fictional production are truly productive: each act of mediation implicated in the production of meaning.

Mighall forwards a similar point in his critique of *Dracula’s* sexual substrata. Typically, the text’s sexual imagery is taken as indicative of the demonization of illicit sexuality. To use

⁵ Halberstam draws similar parallels, arguing that the ‘technology of the vampire’s monstrosity ... is intimately connected to the mode of the novel’s production’ (90).

Mighall's words, it 'is usually implied that *Dracula* demonizes aberrant sexuality by figuring it as vampirism' (226). However, locating the text's sexual imagery within only its scientific minded narrators, Mighall instead proposes that its purpose is intimately associated with the contemporary science of sexology. For contemporary sexologists, Mighall argues, 'the inexplicable and the monstrous could be made meaningful through ... [a] process of sexological reorientation' (216), and accordingly, the text's sexual imagery, produced by like-minded narrators, 'is not so much the demonization of unconventional sexuality as its opposite – the eroticization of the monstrous' (217). The vampire is erotic only as it is eroticised by scientific minded characters who seek to explain it through the state of their scientific art: their writing a place in which to modulate vampirism from the realm of the supernatural, over which all their scientific knowledge and lifework hold no jurisdiction, to the realms of a more manageable sexual threat as is already indexed and can already be assaulted by the full force of their scientific industry.

Whatever *Dracula* 'was' in the fictional reality that the text's narratives claim to describe has been sacrificed for a more palatable version created and sustained by those that write up his fictional existence into the text, an action which finds itself a fitting inversion of *Dracula*'s own palimpsestic threat. His attempts to transmute ordinary persons into supernatural monsters are checked by transmuting him into a comparatively normal, if sexually degenerate, individual, and the inference of this is that, if media in *Dracula* are vampiric, their undeadly capacity to abstract and alter meaning extends to the identities of those whose existence is written up within them.

As this brief analysis of *Dracula*'s metafictional form shows, mediation and remediation, as they occur within the text, are vampiric processes that yield undeadly products. In reference to the mind-body problem, I argued that the undead are a life that is born in our deaths, but which living in our bodies falsely signifies as us. In other words, the undead take their lives from ours, but in doing so make of it their own, and *Dracula* similarly figures the products of remediation as a mutation on the reality they appear to describe. Within the novel, its media and the identities of those represented within them are both distorted simulacra: as they are taken up again and again in different media forms, an existing life is abstracted and made into something new. Therefore, *Dracula*'s representation of media within itself is engaged in the kind of philosophical reflections I have proposed are characteristic of fictions of the undead.

In this dissertation I will argue that this connection between media and undeath is revisited and remodelled at significant points in the undead's history. Before I can advance this hypothesis however, it is first necessary to clarify my terms: what the term 'undead' means;

the manner in which it is used here to describe both a Gothic monster and a literary and cinematic tradition; and the distinctions between the undead and the vampire or zombie.

Readers will be familiar with the term ‘undead’, since it is frequently called upon as a loose descriptor for the vampire, the zombie or the sum of the two. For most purposes, this usage is innocuous. However, it is insufficient to describe the undead as a discrete type of monster and a textual tradition of its own, because not all vampires and zombies are actually or meaningfully undead.

Two prominent examples are John Polidori’s 1819 novel, *The Vampyre*, and Victor Halperin’s 1932 film, *White Zombie*. The monsters of each are important to their respective traditions of the vampire and the zombie. None, however, are undead. The zombies of *White Zombie* are entranced slaves, and the vampires of *The Vampyre*, while cursed with immortality like their undead counterparts, have never, as it were, died – they are immortal, but that is all.

This distinction is largely historical. Undeath is Stoker’s invention, and it is only after his seminal *Dracula* (1897) therefore that the vampire becomes undead. Whilst it is only after Romero’s popularisation of what is retroactively dubbed the modern or undead zombie, as defined against the voodoo zombie, that the zombie joins the undead’s ranks. In the post-war texts on which this dissertation concentrates therefore, fictions of the undead *are* fictions of the vampire and the zombie; and vice versa. However, the implications of this distinction extend which texts are or are not fictions of the undead to which are important to the developing genealogy of the undead as a breed of Gothic monster and a literary and cinematic tradition of its own.

There has yet to be a study of the undead’s genealogical development, and a full accounting of this will be necessary before we can fully understand the complex relationships between the vampire, the zombie and the undead. In lieu of any such study however, I will construct my own brief analysis. To define *the* undead as a literary and cinematic tradition we must first define *an* undead, and to do this we must define their defining existential state: undeath. As I have reasoned however, undeath is a semiotic conundrum which is purposefully inept at describing the monsters to which it refers. The term evades a definition by reference to itself alone. For assistance in this task therefore, I turn to Stoker’s *Dracula*.

Most of the few explicit reference to undeath in Stoker’s novel are made in relation to the ritual execution of Lucy, one of Dracula’s victims. ‘In trance she died,’ Van Helsing informs us, ‘and in trance she is Un-Dead’ (167). She becomes undead after she has died at the hands

of one similarly undead, and with this new existential state comes ‘the curse of immortality; they cannot die, but must go on age after age adding new victims and multiplying the evils of the world; for all that die from the preying of the Un-Dead become themselves Un-Dead, and prey on their kind’(178). In Stoker’s text the undead are immortal beings whose life, or undeath, begins *after* death.

Vampires before Stoker’s were capable of similar tricks. Ruthven of Polidori’s *The Vampyre* dies and resurrects by moonlight, as does Varney of the popular Victorian serial, *Varney the Vampire*. Both however, rise from death as the person from whose death they rise. Ruthven dies as Ruthven and resurrects as the same, whereas the vampires of Stoker’s novel do not. He makes clear that the undead Lucy is not the same person as the Lucy from whose death she is born. When the former is ‘made to rest as true dead, then the soul of the poor lady whom we love shall again be free’(178); leaving Lucy as ‘she was’(177) - ‘all may be well with the dead that we love, [once] the Un-Dead pass away’(179). In Stoker’s novel, the undead are beings whose life is lived in our bodies but which, beginning at our deaths, is not our own. They are a life, a person, of their own.

Following Stoker’s turn of the century novel, undeath became canon in the vampire myth as it was taken up by his myriad imitators. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the undead vampire proliferated, enjoying a particular success in its cinematic incarnations: notably Browning’s 1931 *Dracula* and its sequels. During this time however, undeath would remain a characteristic of the vampire exclusively. In this fifty year stretch the zombie enjoyed an equal degree of popularity, again in a largely cinematic tradition marked at its beginning and end by *White Zombie* (1931) and *The Plague of the Zombies* (1966). However, they were not the undead hordes we know today but the living entranced and put to work by what was often speciously linked to voodoo rights. The undead zombie only makes its appearance in the latter half of the twentieth century, carved into the cultural imagination by Romero’s ground-breaking *Living Dead* trilogy (1968-1985), in which Romero imagined the zombie as a sanguine undead corpse that flocked in hordes and fed on the living.

A point of clarification is necessary here, because it might be implied that in the latter half of the twentieth century the voodoo zombies of the former underwent an undeathly transformation similar to that of the vampire fifty years before it. However, this is not case, because the undead zombies as popularised by Romero’s *Living Dead* trilogy were not historically zombies at all. They were originally ‘ghouls’ and they took their cue from the vampires of Matheson’s 1954 novel, *I am Legend*, the monsters of which were vampires by name and diet but which pre-empted the undead zombie in their numbers and limited

brainpower (Romero, "Preface" 6-7). Romero's ghouls would only ever become zombies as the two were speciously linked by one explicit reference to 'voodoo' and another to the 'zombie' in Romero's sequel, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and 'the connection only became automatic after *Dawn of the Dead* was retitled *Zombies* in the UK and *Zombi* for non-English-speaking markets' (Hervey 56).

The undead began as vampires and evolved to create the undead zombie, and if they ever became a type of Gothic monster with a literary and cinematic tradition of their own it is pursuant to this emancipatory gesture. As they became concurrently expressed in the vampire and the zombie in the latter half of the twentieth century, they were no longer reducible to either. It is in these post-war contexts therefore that I will base this dissertation, analysing how the relationship between media and undeath that begins in Stoker's originary *Dracula* is remodelled at defining moments in the undead's developing tradition.⁶

The first case study of this dissertation will begin with an analysis of Matheson's 1954 *I am Legend*, which emancipated the undead into post-war American contexts as it began to strip Stoker's undead vampires of their vampiric accoutrements. In the text, identities are always in the process of changing; however this change is not limited to the dictates of its monsters' contagion. Reading the novel alongside Judith Butler's account of performative identity, I will argue that identities therein are always changing because they are socio-cultural products, created by socio-cultural pressures and therefore subject to their change. In the novel, a person's identity emerges as they enact and internalise that which they perceive they are or should be, and these perceptions are inspired and informed by the media that circulate the novel's fictional world in a distinctly performative conception of identity. Even its vampires, whose ordinarily supernatural origin story is revamped with a 'scientific' alternative are in part media-made, and rightly so. Identity in *I am Legend* is the viral product of an undeadly industry, and media is its contagioned life-blood.

My next case study will concentrate on Romero's 1968 film, *Night of the Living Dead*, which took Matheson's quasi-vampire monster and excised its vampiric elements, resulting in what would retroactively be labelled the undead zombie, as popularised both by what is currently Romero's hexalogy of *Living Dead* films and its almost numberless contemporary

⁶ I stress here that although the undead share many of their significant moments in common with those of the vampire and the zombie, a significant moment for one is not necessarily the same for the other. Browning's 1931 *Dracula*, for instance, is a defining point for the tradition of the vampire. His opera-caped version of the count informed the popular cultural understanding of what a vampire is to this day. Yet, it is insubstantial to the undead in that it did little if anything to develop what it was to be or experience the undead. On the other hand, Richard Matheson's *I am Legend* made no substantial contribution to what the vampire was or how it was understood. Nonetheless, it is a defining moment for the undead – the nexus of their emancipation.

imitators. In the film's siege scenario, radio and television are the only source of information and advice on the film's unfolding situation for characters and audiences alike. Both mediums are integral to the film's developing plot, but of the two, television is particularly important. Television unites the text's otherwise discordant characters around a single point of focus and a single plan of action, ultimately sending them and the film to their climactic ends. Unlike in *I am Legend* however, this media form does not impact the identities of those that use it *directly*.

Drawing on humanistic geographies of place I will argue that 'being-in-place' is essential to characters' continued self-identification – the meaningful human meaningfully placed defined against the meaningless existence of the essentially placeless zombie by way of the film's siege dynamic, in which place materializes the metaphoric divide between the living and the undead. This hypothesis is to some extent against the critical trajectory of this study. However, rather than read the film against its grain in adducing a direct correspondence between media and identity, I will instead argue that this connection is routed through its evident fascination with place. Television, I will show, affects its users as it manipulates their experience and understanding of the world around them and by extension their place within it, ultimately concluding that television is itself a kind of non-physical place that is bi-laterally engaged in a defining relationship with those who use it.

The concluding case study of this analysis will turn to the global proliferation of found footage infected zombie movies, focusing particularly on Balagueró and Plaza's *[REC]* (2007), Romero's *Diary of the Dead* (2008) and Wingard et al.'s *V/H/S/2* (2013). The two previous chapters each demarcated paradigmatic shifts in the undead as their bestiary expanded: undeath becoming irreducible to the vampire and therefore emancipated as a type of Gothic monster of its own. This chapter will similarly touch upon a different undead beast: the infected zombie. However, it will only do so tangentially. These films, I stress, do not represent the infected zombie's point of origin. Rather, these films are the subject of this study's final chapter because they characterise the changing ways, the increasingly immediate and interactive narrative modes, through which the undead are engaged in contemporary contexts. Returning to *Dracula's* metafictional roots, these films are figured as their own production in motion. They are attentive to their own media form and the processes that underpin their production and use. Drawing on phenomenological accounts of the film experience, I will show that, at once, they establish a metaphorical parity between their own media flesh and the zombies they contain, figuring themselves as zombie-like subjects; at the same time, this figuration of zombie-media implies a zombie-like relationship between media and its users. In these films, film itself has an identity, and the

existence of *its* identity, an identity that feeds on the efforts of those that produce it, questions the limits to which media-dependent-users have lost their own.

This study is not structured on a single theoretical apparatus or context, or on a single cultural focus. It moves freely between theories of performative identity, humanistic geography and phenomenological accounts of the film experience; the theoretical apparatus adduced in each chapter will depend on the texts analysed within them. It also shifts from the American focus of *I am Legend* and *Night of the Living Dead* to the global spread of the found footage film phenomenon. Consequently, I will not conclude that my central thematics, media, identity and undeath, are consistently interfaced in any stable syntax. On the contrary, it is my argument that the undead *de*-stabilise, and this is borne out in the vastly different manners in which each of the texts analysed approaches these conjoined thematics. Like the monsters they contain, fictions of the undead are not reconcilable to neat, contained systems: they yield no homogenous 'answers'. However, answers are beyond the point. What this theoretical diversity demonstrates is that it is the questions that undeath's defining existential state ask that matter.

Chapter 2

Media-Made Vampires: Identity as the Performance of Media Scripts in Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*

It is rare that Matheson's 1954 vampire novel, *I am Legend*, is the subject of extended critical analysis, arguably because the specific breed of monster he creates has no place in a critical industry fascinated with the vampire or the zombie. His monsters are vampires by name and diet, but they pre-empt the undead zombie in their numbers and brainpower. Whilst they therefore *belong* to both, they are insignificant in the histories of either. They are only aberration in the history of the vampire, and a footnote in the tradition of the zombie as inspiration for the genre defining *Living Dead* series (Romero, "Preface" 6-7). However, as the first text since the undead's beginnings in Stoker's *Dracula* to move away from the classically defined vampire, Matheson's novel represents an indispensable moment in the history of the undead. It is the point at which, for the first time, undeath was *more* than just an aspect of the vampire, and although the specific mutation that Matheson imagined would live an exceptionally short life, resurrected for only the first of even its own cinematic adaptations,¹ it nonetheless shaped the course of the undead's history: paving the way for the undead zombie and, one might argue, prescient of their 'infected' successors.

Given that the novel was released at the height of Cold War tensions, the instinctive reaction is to rationalise Matheson's text in relation to its turbulent context, which is by all means possible. As I will explain, the novel's description of a post-apocalyptic world is neatly connected with the contemporary anti-communist hysteria, reading as an allegory against the creation of a communist threat in the cultural imagination. *I am Legend* has sure connections with its anxious contexts; however, I will argue that it is not limited to them. At its core, Matheson's text is an exploration of identity: what one is, how and why.

The novel formulates a *de facto* theorisation of identity in which a subject's identity is that into which that subject becomes as it enacts socio-cultural scripts and thereby co-opts their dictates, an account similar to Judith Butler's influential theorisation of performative

¹ Of its three film adaptations: *The Last Man on Earth*, *The Omega Man* and *I am Legend*, only *The Last Man on Earth* features undead monsters resembling those of Matheson's original text.

identity, and in the novel this performative social mechanism is contained within the media that circulate its world. So I will show, identities in *I am Legend* are viral products, that with which oneself is stained by contagious contact with various forms of media.

Criticism on Matheson's novel is relatively sparse, at least in contrast to the critical attention paid to other fictions of the undead. However, what attention the novel *has* attracted is welcomingly diverse in its theoretical approach. Waller, for instance, approaches the text from a perspective not dissimilar to my own, being that he similarly proposes that notions of undeath have direct inferences on the living against which they are defined. Specifically, his focus is on the dynamic that exists between the living and the undead, and his theoretical model is therefore in-tune with novel, the role reversal ending of which turns on the significance that the vampire and the vampire-hunter bear on each other and each other's societies.

In fictions of the vampire before Matheson, the 'religious faith' behind the vampire-hunter's actions 'transform[ed] desecration into a redemptive act'; the hunters 'into holy crusaders' (Waller 259). However, by virtue of the novel's role-reversal ending, the moral compass that ordinarily oriented the vampire novel is absent in Matheson's text: 'Neville is no more an embodiment of good than the undead are an embodiment of Evil' (Waller 258). The novel, Waller argues, 'remind[s us] that all definitions of the monstrous are relative' (261). At the same time however, he argues that it makes clear that 'horror stories' and the monsters that inhabit them 'are essential, for they define by contrast the Good' (262). Thus, Waller's account looks to the ways in which the changing relationship between the living and the undead in Matheson's novel examines the social need for the monstrous: '[i]n a world where Dracula does not exist, Matheson implies, he must and will be invented' (Waller 262).

Christie's analysis is similarly focused on the novel's changing social dynamic. Rather than read it in terms of the social construction of the monster however, she inverts the focus to the shifting markers of humanity. 'Neville', she argues, 'fail[s] to recognize his own too-narrowly-defined classification for humanity, and in his error he has been the agent of humanity's destruction. He has become the threat, the virus, the social containment that must be removed like a tumor before the social body can re-form and heal' – 'Neville has become the monster and the vampire have become representatives of the post-human' (76).²

² Here, Christie takes her definition of the post-human from one of several forwarded by Robert Pepperell, being in this instance 'to indicate that our conceptual construction of what it means to be human is undergoing a profound transformation' (Christie 68).

For Christie, the undead's literally post-human existence reflects on the significance of our own in that it measures the shifting boundaries of what we consider as 'the human': they reflect on the changing social construction of what I would term a sort of human 'identity'. In this, her analysis is not dissimilar to my own. Whereas she concentrates on the social construction of the human however, mine will hone in on the ways which the same relationship between the human and the vampire in the novel explores the social construction of our own *personal* identity.

Before beginning this argument, I want to address the novel's glaring significance as an allegory of its anxious contexts. Patterson highlights one such context by reading the novel in terms of the contemporary Civil Rights movement. Noting that its vampires are constantly 'referred to in connection with blackness' (Patterson 20): '[s]omething black and of the night' (*Legend* 17), 'black bastards' (*Legend* 24) and 'black unholy animal[s]' (*Legend* 103), she argues that the novel 'contains a very clear, racially charged subtext that reflects the cultural anxieties of a white America newly confronted with the fact that it can no longer segregate itself from those whom it has labelled Other' (19). However, it is with its Cold War context that Matheson's post-atomic novel most plainly relates.

Clasen has noted that '*I am Legend* obviously extrapolates from the kind of anxieties that grow particularly well in the shadow of a mushroom cloud' (318). The novel, he argues, 'hit a live nerve in the fevered American Cold War imagination' (326). However, he quickly moves on to suggest that although the text is 'at once intensely personal and highly dependent on local, sociohistorical anxieties ... [, that] the story retains its power to engage and to disturb in contexts far removed from that of its production' (313) indicates that it is not to be limited by them. Instead he argues that 'an evolutionary perspective offers the best explanation for the underlying continuity in horror fiction' (313) and roots the novel's anxious content in terms of our evolutionary heritage. 'We should not', he warns, 'lose sight of the vampire's literal presence: the vampire is, first and foremost, a *predator*' (318).

Clasen's theoretical approach is refreshing, but I want to more fully flesh out what a typical reading of *I am Legend* in terms of the anxieties of its Cold War context might look like, and to do this I will construct my own anxiety model analysis. The dominant metaphor in American Cold War rhetoric was that communism was 'a disease that spreads like an epidemic' (Hoover qtd. in Hendershot 48): a dangerous ideology that threatened to infect America's lifeblood, transfusing it with its own corrupt variant. Communism was visualized as a distinctly vampiric threat, and, as Hendershot notes in a survey of contemporary American film, fictions of the vampire often galvanized this parallel, employing a 'disease metaphor [to] relate the vampire to post-nuclear-war fallout ... [, and to] connect[] the

vampire to McCarthyist concerns over communism as a disease infecting post-war America' (48).

I am Legend is no exception to this trend. Matheson's post-apocalyptic narrative of an America destroyed from within by a mutational disease, one tentatively associated with nuclear fallout no-less, clearly taps in to the anti-communist hysteria in which it was produced. Matheson's vampires are evident stand-ins for the paranoid notion that anyone could be, or could become, 'one of them', infected by the insidious disease of communist ideology – but the text, of course, does not endorse this paranoia.

Neville, the novel's last human survivor, is at once imagined as a valiant American combatted against a virulent communist disease. However, this image of Neville as an American anti-communist is composited with that of Neville as a Nazi anti-Semite. He is also a blonde-haired, blue-eyed half-German intent on ridding the world of what he believes is an entire class of diseased sub-humans, harbouring a particular hostility towards his Jewish neighbour.³ His persecution of the vampire, and America's persecution of the communist, is therefore compared to the then recent atrocities of the Second World War. If the novel calls to account the image of the communist-as-vampire, it does so only to the extent that it undermines it, ending with a role-reversal in which Neville realises that *he* is the monster that haunts the novel's world.

It is clear that *I am Legend* has contextual value as an *anti-anti-communist* parable, that first situates its vampires as lucid stand-ins for communist ideologies, and then demonises their demonisation. Hence, turning the prevailing disease metaphor of anti-communist rhetoric on its head, Matheson describes the very 'dread of vampires' as itself 'cancerous' (*Legend* 105). Fear of the vampire, and by extension the communist, is figured as the very same insidious disease it claimed to out. However, *I am Legend* is much more than this reading allows. The text looks to the inequities of American anti-communist rhetoric, but it simultaneously looks back to the persecution of minorities in Nazi Germany, and at the same time it pre-emptively future, albeit fictional, abuses of power in the shape of the once oppressed vampires who by the text's end have already become oppressors in their own right: the so-called 'living vampires' artificially distinguishing themselves from their undead counterparts and pursuing their brutal, wholesale destruction.

³ Waller similarly states that 'the scientific work of the decent, adaptable, ingenious Robert Neville is disturbingly similar in kind to the notorious experimentation conducted in Nazi concentration camps on Jews and other "subhuman" species, experiments carried out to "advance" scientific knowledge and to develop more efficient means of disposal' (261).

Given Matheson's vegetarian politics,⁴ it might even be stated that the breadth of his enquiry should not even be limited to an exploration of the iniquitous social situations into which we, as humans, orientate ourselves in relation others. The vampire motif re-enters the human into the depths of the food-chain, and by doing so it questions the moral assumptions of meat-eaters,⁵ highlighting the injustices of killing and eating other animals by repositioning the human as one such animal. The iniquitous relationships between humans and vampires in Matheson's text might *allegorise* social injustices, but they are themselves a representation of the unjust relationships that the human forms with other species.

Although Matheson's novel *can* therefore be read as an allegory on the social inequities of its turbulent context, its Cold War allegory is set up as only one iteration in a larger, cycling system within which notions such as 'the oppressor' and 'the oppressed' are ephemeral categories that are always on the cusp of riotous change and even total inversion. It is therefore my claim that, as much as *I am Legend* is concerned with any one instance of relations within this system, it is also concerned with its systematic whole. That is, *I am Legend* is concerned with how any subject *becomes* the oppressor or the oppressed; the vampire or the human; the living vampires or the undead; the Nazi or the Jew; or the American or the Soviet. Better yet, it is concerned with how a subject becomes anything at all.

Identities, what a subject ostensibly 'is', are always subject to change in *I am Legend*. This is not uncharacteristic for a fiction of the undead, the defining monsters of which thrive precisely because of their capacity to make us 'one of them'. However, in Matheson's novel, this change is not limited to that compelled by its undead monster's contagion. Its vampires might turn their victims into beings of their own kind. However, by the end of the novel, these very same vampires 'become' beings not unlike the human. Whilst Neville, on an alternate front, begins as a blue-collar, work-a-day American, is transformed into a vampire-slayer turned scientist, and then makes a final 'transformation' into a monster of his own special kind. All of these might not constitute transformations in the most traditional of senses: some pertain to biological change, others to behavioural and the final to perspective. Yet, this is my very point. *I am Legend* draws a world in which identity is always moving,

⁴ Matheson states in the February 1951 edition of the *Worlds Beyond* magazine that he 'vote[s] straight Vegetarian ticket' (n.pag). Matheson's vegetarian ideals are also lucidly evidenced in his short story, "Revolution" (2004), a sardonic glance at the average American meat-eater.

⁵ In his short story "Revolution", Matheson provides an example of such a moral assumption as the text's antagonist cites evolutionary theory in evidence of the morality of eating meat (10). The assumption is that the human, as a superior organism, is morally correct in killing inferior organisms; a moral assumption tested in *I am Legend* as the human is positioned as one such inferior organism and its destruction ordained by that same logic.

sometimes with and sometimes against the expected current, and I suggest that the world that Matheson describes therefore constitutes an exploration of identity: a problematisation of what one is, how and why.

To begin this analysis in earnest, I will start with an evaluation of Neville's changing identity. Neville begins the novel as a blue-collar, work-a-day American and becomes a monster not unlike the vampire, ending both the novel and his life with the realisation that 'like the vampires, he was anathema and black terror to be destroyed' (*Legend* 161). This is a human-monster transformation which is not unexpected in fictions of this kind. In fact, transformations of this kind are commonplace in *I am Legend*, which describes a world subject to a cataclysmic flood of vampires and their catalytic industry. What is not expected, however, is that Neville is swept up in the vampire's torrent of change in spite of his immunity to its contagion, suggesting that the vampire's transformative ability, if it is indeed the vampire's at all, is other than the disease it carries.

In a world where the vampire's ordinarily supernaturally contagioned blood is replaced with a scientific equivalent in the shape of sporulating bacteria, it is only fitting that the power of the vampire to make monsters is no longer a direct result of contracting its disease: that disease no longer associable with the occult and therefore is no longer evil in and of itself. To a similar end, Waller argues that '*I Am Legend* suggests that in a world that does not contain Good or Evil, violence, even when it is directed against the undead and when it is undertaken in the name of survival, necessarily dehumanizes and creates monsters' (262). Perhaps, then, it is not the text's 'vampiric disease' that creates its monsters, but the violence which that disease incites in those it has infected. By extension, it is perhaps also the case that if Neville becomes a being 'like the vampire[]' (*Legend* 161) in spite of his natural immunity to their contagion, it is because of the violence he commits, acts which, if not impelled by the text's vampiric contagion at a biological level, are nonetheless incited by its outlet in the vampire, whose nightly attacks are percipient to Neville's violent behaviours.

However, this neat equation between violence and monstrosity is untenable in the moral relativist world that Matheson describes. Here, '[m]orality ... had fallen with society' (*Legend* 50). Morality is a socio-cultural construct, and from this relativist standpoint, *nothing* is wrong and *nothing* is monstrous except that first registered as such. Therefore, if Neville's violence makes him a monster, as I conjecture it does, it is not because violence '*necessarily* ... creates monsters [emphasis added]' (Waller 262), but because Neville's violent acts are first registered as monstrous in the ethical framework of the vampire's society. One should note that, if Neville is the 'terrible scourge' he believes

himself to be, it is not because he definitively is one, but because ‘to them [the vampires] he was’ (*Legend* 160).

What Neville ‘is’ is dependent on from whose perspective you look.⁶ However, it is important to note that Neville is not only perceived as a monster, but that he comes to perceive himself as one – he comes to *identify* as one – a change that comes after he meets Ruth, a disguised vampire who openly decries his slaughter of her kind (*Legend* 135). Exposure to Ruth’s perception of him inflects Neville’s perception of himself: it changes his identity as it changes how he identifies. Thus, the mutational agency that operates in the text’s world is neither a bacterial contagion, nor, as Waller argues, violence; it is the mutational potential of perception.

This is confirmed by a closer analysis of *I am Legend*’s particular reconfiguration of the vampire, the alternate life of which is rationalised by the so-called *vampiris bacillus*, a bacterium that explains the vampiric mutations that occur in the text and the alternate life-force that maintains its resultant undead. Bacteria, Neville argues, is the vampire’s ‘true story’ (*Legend* 72). However, it is also made explicitly clear that it is not its *whole* story. Many of the symptoms that identify those infected *as* vampires – their fear of religious icons and mirrors for example – are inexplicable in bacteriological terms alone, and Neville accordingly theorises that the vampire is part biology and part sociology: some of their defining characteristics ‘physically caused, the rest psychological’ (*Legend* 104). This is to say that although the diseased are animated by the bacterium they carry, their identities as vampires – in contrast to the diseased that they are – is the result of *more* than this contagion, and Neville locates the source of these completing psychosomatic symptoms in the ‘cancerous dread of vampires’ (*Legend* 105) that ravaged the text’s world in its final fictional days. So he ultimately concludes, the vampires are those diseased who having ‘died with the terror in their hearts’ that the vampire was real, and ‘hav[ing] this hideous dread vindicated’ as they rose once more, ‘snapped’ (*Legend* 105), believing themselves to be the vampires they feared they were to become. The inference of this is that the diseased are not in themselves vampires. Rather, they became vampires once their disease was commonly associated with vampirism. To use an alternate turn of phrase, the diseased became the vampire they perceived themselves perceived to be.

⁶ The novel invites its reader to understand this point by the *double entendre* of ‘I am Legend’ that frames the text at its beginning and end as its title and Neville’s dying words. Each reading possesses a different meaning, positive or negative, dependent on a reader’s perspective, suggesting by demonstration that who Neville ‘is’ is relative to the position of those that perceive him.

That the mutational agency responsible for the creation and distortion of identities in the text's world is the perception of others' perceptions is most apparent in the social construction of the monster – the creation of Neville's monstrous identity in the vampire's world and the vampire's in Neville's. However, the same social constructivist philosophy underwrites identification across the various identities that the text's characters take, monstrous or not. For example, as Neville perceives himself as perceived to be a human in a world where vampires are a reality, he becomes that variant of the human. This change is less noticeable than that which would befall Neville at the end of the text, but it is nonetheless evidenced in his altered attitudes and behaviours: his animosity towards his diseased brethren and the highly ritualised use of a wooden stake through which he expresses it. Understanding the diseased as vampires, Neville actualizes himself as a vampire hunter.

If identities in *I am Legend* are always in flux, it is because identities in its world are socio-cultural constructs. What any subject 'is' is not an essential, inviolable part of their being but the internalisation and enactment of what others perceive that subject is or should be: it is that into which a subject becomes by the mandate of socio-cultural pressures and it is therefore subject to change. Driven by the perception of perception, the socio-cultural mechanisms that underpin this essentially mutational industry are strikingly similar to those that Foucault would propose some twenty years later in his writing on panopticism, in which he famously argued that a subject who is 'subjected to a field of visibility, and ... knows it, ... becomes the principle of ... [their] own subjection' (*Discipline* 202-03): that the perception of others' perceptions, real or imagined, exerts a regulatory power capable of guiding a subject's behaviours. However, I propose that it is with Judith Butler's theorisation of identity as 'performative' that *I am Legend* has its closest comparator.

Not to be confused with a performance, with a consciousness enactment of identity by a free-thinking subject that can pick and choose what shapes his or her identity will take, Butler's theory draws on the performative of 'speech act theory'. A performative is 'that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names', as for example in the biblical '[l]et there be light' (*Bodies* 13),⁷ and identities, Butler theorises, are products of similar discursive practices: the result of the 'reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (*Bodies* xii). Thus, a subject's identity is that into

⁷ Butler warns against this possible misinterpretation in *Bodies That Matter*. She writes that to imagine that 'one woke in the morning, perused the closet ... for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night ... would restore a figure of a choosing subject ... at the center of a project whose emphasis on construction seems to be quite opposite to such a notion' (*Bodies* x).

which a subject becomes as they realise the dictate of socio-cultural discourses, or ‘regulatory ideals’ (*Bodies* 1), that describe the normative parameters of the identities which a subject might take.

However, Butler stresses that ‘[p]erformativity is ... not a singular “act,” for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition’ (*Bodies* 12). Butler borrows this notion from Derrida, who argues that a ‘performative utterance [could not] succeed if its formulation did not repeat a “coded” or iterable utterance’; if it were ‘not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model’ in which the performative act ‘were not then identifiable in some way as a “citation”’ (Derrida qtd. in Butler, *Bodies* 13). In simpler terms, the power of the performative is not in and of the performative act or discourse itself but in the concept that it references and in referencing normalizes.

Thus, for Butler, a subject’s identity is formed as that subject enacts the dictate of regulatory ideals; a process of identification that a subject is impelled to undergo as that ideal is repeatedly enacted or otherwise cited by others; that subject’s resultant identification reinforcing the validity of that script and impelling its enactment by others in a continuous, cyclical system. In even simpler terms, a subject’s identity is that into which a subject becomes as they unwittingly enact the dictate of socio-cultural scripts: blueprints for identity that are actualized as their perceived validity impels their enactment, thereby corroborating their validity and so forth.

Butler, of course, speaks in specific relation to the creation of a *gendered* identity, whereas *I*, and I argue *I am Legend*, do not. Nevertheless, the social mechanism she describes are similar to those that underpin *I am Legend*’s own *de facto* model of identity, in which identity is also that to which a subject is inured as they are impelled to enact and thereby internalise that which they perceive themselves as perceived to be. Writing some forty years after Matheson, it goes without mention that Butler’s theorisation is only coincidentally connected to Matheson’s text. Matheson was neither inspired by Butler directly, nor by the same philosophical ethos from which she was writing. Her text, however, is a nonetheless insightful comparator, and it highlights one particular point, that the transformative power of the perceptive acts that underwrite the text’s various transformations is not in these acts in and of themselves, but rather the regulatory ideals they reference; and in referencing, enforce.

This point is best elaborated through a closer analysis of Matheson’s particular configuration of the vampire. As discussed, Matheson’s vampires are those afflicted with the text’s

fictional disease who identified as vampires pursuant to their disease being associated with vampirism, which is to say that the diseased became the vampires they were perceived to be. However, this transformative perceptual link is not empowered at the level of the individual and their individual perceptive acts, but by the ‘cancerous dread of the vampire’ that ‘spread’ to ‘all corners of the nation’ (*Legend* 105). The diseased identified as vampires as they perceived the mass-cultural perception that this was the case, confirming that perception by doing so. Thus, fear of the vampire produces the vampire in a cancerous system that survives by the metamorphic control it exercises over the bodies it describes. ‘[P]roduc[ing] the phenomena that it regulates and constrains’ (J. Butler, *Bodies* xii), this mutational fear might be alternately labelled a regulatory ideal.

Of particular interest to this dissertation is that this ‘cancerous dread’ of the vampire is ‘spread’ by ‘yellow journalism’ (*Legend* 105). The socio-cultural discourse responsible for the text’s vampiric transformations is vestigially contained within the literally discursive fabric of print media, and one will note that this is not the only role that media plays in the diseased’s transformation. Print media incites their identification as vampires, but their capacity to actualize this identification hinges on the knowledge of what a vampire is, and this reserve of information – or better, scripts – is once again found in the media that circulate the text’s world. The diseased become figures normally ‘consigned, fact and figure, to the pages of imaginative literature’: figures from ‘Summer’s idylls or Stoker’s melodramatics ... or raw material for the B-film factories’ (*Legend* 17). They behave, beyond the impetus of their biology, like the vampires of literature and cinema, and they assumedly do so because they have made themselves in this media-image – fictions of the vampire, which circulate the text’s world as they do our own, containing the dominant repository of information on what a vampire is and how to become one. In short, *I am Legend*’s vampires are media-made.

Interestingly, *I am Legend* is not the only of Matheson’s work in which he forwards such a notion. A similar idea is also visited in his earlier fiction of the vampire, his short story, “Drink My Red Blood” (1952). Like *I am Legend*, “Drink My Red Blood” contains very few ‘actual’ vampires, but situates itself about a young boy who becomes enamoured with the vampire myth after reading Stoker’s *Dracula* and watching its cinematic adaptations. The boy steals himself into a bat enclosure and, imitating what he has learned from fiction, stabs himself in the neck with a pen-knife, hoping to swap his blood with a bat’s and in doing so make himself into a vampire, an act which appears to succeed. The parallel between “Drink My Red Blood” and *I am Legend* is unmistakable. In both, the vampire is not the product of a subject transformed by a vampiric contagion, but that into which a subject has transformed

themselves by playing out the roles they perceive to be necessary. In “Drink My Red Blood”, this endeavour is voluntarily engaged where it is otherwise coerced in *I am Legend*. In both, however, these roles are contained within media: explicitly or implicitly located within literature and cinema of the vampire.

On a related note, media play equally defining roles for Neville, who survives his solitary existence surrounded by books, movies and records. Neville makes it a nightly occurrence to combat the vampire's taunting cries with the full sonorous force of his record player (*Legend* 6-7), human noise deployed against the vampire's. However, *as* human noise, this media is much more than its decibels. Neville ‘knew he could put plugs in his ears to shut off the sound of them [the vampires], but that would shut off the music too, and he didn't want to feel that they were forcing him into a shell’ (*Legend* 7). For Neville, music might drown out the vampires' cries, but *as* music, it plays a far more integral, reflexive role. To excise it from his life would be to let the vampires ‘win’, and if the vampire's goal is to make him one of their own – to change who he is – then it is reasonable to assume that to excise music from his life would be to excise a part of himself. Music, Neville's notes, ‘help[s him] to fill the terrible void of hours’ (*Legend* 4). It fills a lack in his life, that lack assumedly a lost human culture which music, as an artefact of that culture, reproduces in its absence, allowing Neville to survive his changed world by maintaining a simulacrum of his former reality.

In the novel, media texts become surrogates for the lost culture in which they were produced, and a noteworthy point in this regard is that this role of media is one of the few features of Matheson's novel to be consistently reproduced in most of its cinematic remakes.⁸ For instance, in Lawrence's 2007 adaptation of the same name, Neville watches recordings of early morning news broadcasts as he prepares and eats breakfast. Its out-of-date information is fundamentally useless; however, content is beside the point. Positioned somewhere in the periphery, audible but not a point of focus, the television lends a semblance of normality to the scene. It replicates the background noise of ordinary, daily life in the absence of any such normality, and this surrogate role of media is further elaborated by Neville's routine visits to a DVD store in which he has set up a host of mannequins with and about whom he can construct mock conversations. Neville's trips, of course, are in part made for their media haul, for the movies with which he fills his evenings and meters out his life. However, they also become a way for him to produce an impression of social

⁸ This focus is present in both *The Omega Man* and *I am Legend* but absent in *The Last Man on Earth*.

interaction, suggesting that the consumption of media is engaged as a form of communication, as a way to feel engaged with a society and its culture in its absence.

In both Matheson's original and Lawrence's remake, media is integral to Neville's survival. It does not, as it did for the diseased-turned-vampires, provide *new* regulatory ideals through which Neville might construct his identity. However, in maintaining a simulacrum of human society and culture – the same in relation to which Neville constructed his human identity – the media with which Neville surrounds himself allow him to continue identifying as his human self well into the apocalypse.⁹

In Matheson's original text, however, Neville's identity does not survive the novel's vampire-apocalypse *entirely* unchanged. So I have argued, he comes to play a specific variation of his human self, becoming the vampire-hunter to the diseased's vampires, and it might now be expanded that this transformation is impelled and guided by the same fictions responsible for theirs. That Neville's vampire-slaying identity is performed from the same socio-cultural scripts as his victims' is already implicitly evidenced in his behaviours: his self-righteous animosity towards their kind and the specific and highly specialised tools through which he expresses it. However, that this is the case is proved beyond doubt in a sequence in which Neville is seen consulting Stoker's *Dracula* and its forebears and followers in an attempt to gain a bearing on the growing undead situation. Hoge has noted that when compared to Neville's later, scientific research, his initial consultation of literature and film is ineffectual: tales of the supernaturally contagioned vampire having no bearing on the text's modern equivalent and fiction none on bacteriological reality (14), and to an extent he is correct. The action-set that Neville adopts from these fictions does not correspond with any essential 'truth' of the situation which it is employed to tackle as his later research will. What Hoge forgets to note, however, is that the techniques that Neville borrows from fiction are nonetheless effective, because they are matched with a version of the vampire performing from the same socio-cultural script.

Identity in *I am Legend* is not biology. Identity is a performance to which its actors are committed to the very bitter end, becoming the roles they enact as the dedication of each to their part binds the other to theirs; that script disseminated through media and, of course,

⁹ Clasen argues that Neville's need for art is testament to Matheson's ability 'to craft a psychologically realistic protagonist' (321). 'Matheson', he writes, 'no doubt intuitively understands the deep psychological need for art that probably everybody experiences: art is a human universal, essential to human nature' (321). Whereas I have argued that the specific sort of art with which Neville surrounds himself informs who he is by replicating a simulacrum of the society and culture in which Neville constructed his human identity, it might also be argued that it informs his identity as a human. When undercover, Ruth admits that she 'never thought [she]'d be listening to music again' (*Legend* 124). The inference is that the vampires have no art of their own.

chosen by and for the dominant members of the society for which it was produced. This is reified in the text's role reversal ending, where both Neville and the vampire once more play different roles from the same socio-cultural script, albeit this time one from the vampire's now dominant society. One will recall that, in this ending, Neville identifies as the monster he is perceived to be by the vampires' society, a role with which he comes to terms through the vampire's 'superstition', their alternate mythoi within which '[he] is legend' (*Legend* 161). It should be noted, however, that by the odd grammatical structure of the phrase, Neville's identity is not merely referenced or even influenced in or by the vampire's myth. Neville *is* legend: his identity and the vampire's myth – their proto-media – are one and the same.¹⁰

I posited that the transformational force in *I am Legend* was, in a departure from the ordinary, other than the vampire's contagion, and it can now be concluded that this *is* the case. Identities, the vampire's included, are figured as expression of regulatory ideals, socio-cultural constructs which coerce subjects to construct their identity in that ideal's image. Moreover, these regulatory ideals are vestigially contained within media. Media carries the contagion that moves the text along where the vampire's infected blood ordinarily would, and one could state, therefore, that media is *itself* a vampire. But if this is so it is only because, in the novel's *de facto* theorisation, identity itself is always vampiric.

In fictions of the undead previous to this point, identity was figured as an essential part of a subject's being, its change a repairable distortion on that being. According to Stoker's paradigmatic *Dracula* and its resident psychologist, Dr Seward, the stable 'self is the fixed point [about which] the centripetal force is balanced with the centrifugal' (Stoker 52). 'Seward's point here ... is that the self is a 'fixed point' that balances the various potentially dangerous forces we contain' (Barrows 76), and the implications of this are twofold. First, who one 'is' is 'fixed': a subject has an identity which is essentially theirs. Second, change to that fixed point is registered as an aberration on that subject. For example, Lucy, having been sapped of life and invigorated anew with undeath, looks like 'the passion masks of the Greeks and Japanese' (Stoker 176). Her identity has changed, and in changing it has ceased to be her, or at least who she 'truly' is. She is a hideous distortion of her former self, but it is nothing that cannot be fixed with the corrective intervention of a stake to the heart, an

¹⁰ I noted in an earlier footnote that art might define the human in contrast to the vampire. If this is the case, the emergence of this 'proto-media' signals the vampire's increasingly 'human' identity. That is, it might be read into arguments similar to those proposed by Christie, in which the novel charts the shifting boundaries of what it is to be human.

exercise that excises the unbalancing elements of undeath and thereby restores her to what 'she was, and *is* [emphasis added]' (Stoker 177).

In contrast, *I am Legend* is something of an anomaly, because, here, there is no essential, nucleic sense of self to be 'vamped'. In *Dracula*, the potency of the vampire's transformative power was registered as an aberration on a fixed point. Whereas in *I am Legend* there is nothing to change that is not already a product of change itself, because in the world Matheson creates, so long as a subject has an identity at all, that subject and its identity is the product of a social machinery whose function is already vampiric. In Matheson's vision, identity is not an essential part of who a subject necessarily 'is', but that with which a subject is infused. Identity is the product of a regulatory ideal which stains the subject with which it interacts in its own image: a process which, in a double of the vampire's bite, sustains itself as it reproduces.

It is an almost instinctive response to read Matheson's post-apocalyptic tale as correspondent with the turbulences of its Cold War context, and as I have indicated the text *can* be read in these historiographical terms. The text does little to hide its biting critique of the overzealous demonization of communism in McCarthy's America, mirroring the creation of the communist threat in contemporary cultural imagination with that of the vampire in the novel's fictional equivalent. Like the 'communist threat', its vampires are the product of a self-actualizing fear which is, as was that of communism, 'consistently hammered' into the cultural consciousness by '[l]iterature, movies, art, and the media' (Kutler vii). Matheson's nonstandard configuration of the vampire invites speculation as to what the vampire 'is', encouraging its readers to query the vampire's identity in and out of metaphoric contexts and to ask how and why 'we' became 'them'. The novel might therefore be read in context as an allegory on the social construction of communist and capitalist identities; however, it is not limited by this contextually specific meaning.

At its core, *I am Legend* is an investigation of identity and the processes of identification. Its peculiar configuration of the vampire, which unlike its ancestors is not animated by a supernatural contagion, raises questions as to what, how and why its vampires are: how 'we' succeeded in becoming 'them', a query that expands to what it is to be 'us' at all. The novel drafts a *de facto* model of identity in which what any subject 'is' is not an essential facet of that subject's being but that into which that subject has become through repeat performances of socio-cultural scripts. Identity in *I am Legend* is the result of a palimpsestic process, the operative mechanisms of which are not only similar to those associated with the vampire, but are themselves responsible for the vampire's existence. Here, identity is itself a viral

product, and its contagion is spread through infectious contact with the media that circulate the text's world, its contagioned lifeblood.

Chapter 3

Being in Place and Placeless Beings: Place, Identity and Television in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*

It goes without saying that Romero's 1968 classic, *Night of the Living Dead*, is a landmark text in the undead's history. The film follows a discordant group of individuals seeking shelter from a rapidly escalating zombie outbreak, and this vision of an America jolted into chaos was timely. 'Louis Harris, looking back from 1973, identified 1968 as a turning point in American's sense of safety, citing assassinations, race riots and sharply escalating street crime' (Hervey 51):

Somehow, almost overnight, the entire hierarchy of orderly communications in a democracy was being by-passed ... suddenly the streets had become a battleground, no neighbourhood was immune. Life had been reduced to the raw and primitive proposition of physical survival right outside the house where one lived. (Louis Harris qtd. in Hervey 51).

It is unsurprising therefore that critics have read the anxious content of Romero's film in terms of the anxious contexts in which it was produced. 'Among many other things,' the film is 'a comment on race relations, a clever satire on the nation's defences and communications networks, and a critique of environmental dangers – as engendered by the space race' (Monteith 90). It 'captures the mood of its era by allegorically representing an America divided against itself' (Williams 22).

It is the film's racially charged subtext however, that is most pronounced. The only survivor of the film's eponymous night is Ben, its young, black protagonist. He successfully weathers the zombie outbreak by hiding in the basement. By the morning, a posse has assembled and a successful clean-up is underway. Safety appears to be in reach, but upon leaving his hiding place Ben is mistaken for a zombie and shot dead.

There is no explicit reference to the racial motivations of the vigilante's actions. If we take characters at their word, he has sighted what he thought was a ghoul and has, in line with the purpose of this assembly, dispatched it. Nevertheless, the image of a black man shot dead by

a vigilante mob, one led by a ‘Bull Connor-like police chief’ (Heffernan 67) no less, has clear, racially charged implications for its time.

‘[R]acism, above all, inevitably came to mind when 1960s audiences watched this trigger-happy, all-white confederacy of cops and conservative-looking countryfolk. They’d seen groups like this on the news, cracking heads at civil rights marches. Those dogs look like the ones that Birmingham police loosed on defenceless schoolchildren during 1963’s anti segregation demonstrations. ... The last sequence, as the men drag Ben out with meat hooks and burn him, is shown in stills The film-makers printed the shots through cheesecloth to make them coarse and grainy, like newsprint. If we’re used to *Night*’s evening news look by now, these shots drive home the ending’s truthfulness, its real-world associations – which are above all racial.’ (Hervey 111-113)

When asked about his ‘formula with the black hero’ (*INTERVIEW* qtd. in Hervey 24), Romero maintained that ‘[it] was an accident. The whole movie was an accident’ (Romero qtd. in Hervey 24). While Russo, his co-writer, more aggressively rebuffed critics who ‘jumped off the deep end in likening the ghouls to the silent majority and f[ound] all sorts of implications’ as ‘full of shit’ (Russo qtd. in Hervey 24).

This does not alter the fact that the film *was* understood in these terms by contemporary critics and at least a portion of its counter-culture viewership. However, it does question the extent to which context has been overzealously extrapolated *into* the film. Is Ben, whose achievements include beating the hysteria out of a mourning Barbara, really the hero he has been made out to be? Is Harry, whose main affront is cowardice, really the villain: the ‘unpleasant WASP paterfamilias’, ‘I’horrible bourgeois’, [or] ‘blanc et ignoble’ (Hervey 62) like contemporary critics claimed? These questions require further investigation, but they will not receive this attention here. Rather, I raise them to suggest, as I will show, that the film cannot be reduced to the polarised, counter-cultural terms in which it is ordinarily understood.

Like the defining fictions of the undead before it, media plays a vital role in *Night of the Living Dead*. For characters cut off from the outside world, broadcast is the only source of advice and information on the developing undead situation. Broadcast is the beating heart that moves the film along, and it comes in two distinct forms, radio and television. Both are important; but of the two, it is television that stands out.

In popular cultural memory of the film's late sixties context, television is almost always conceptualised as falling on the wrong side of the youth-driven counter-culture movement reaching its apex around the time of the film's production and release (Spigel and Curtin 1-2). It is therefore unsurprising that existing scholarship on the matter suggests that broadcast in *Night of the Living Dead* is 'seen as negatively, even fatally influential': 'useless[], inappropriate[], and ... exploitati[ve]' (Sobchack, *Screening Space* 189-90).¹

This reading is certainly there for the taking. Characters die in the pursuit of televised advice, and in dying they are doomed to rise again as zombies: part of a mindless collective whose voiceless swarm doubtlessly metaphorized Nixon's 'silent majority' for the film's counter-culture following.² Thus, the film might be read as an indictment of the vacuous products of right-wing media, as it surely was by at least a politicised portion of its contemporary audience. Yet, however viable this analysis is as a reading of potential contextual readings, it is unsupported by the film's content.

Characters will die when following televised advice. However, they do not die *because* of it. It is not, as Cameron has argued, 'out-of-date information' that 'lead[s] ... [the film's characters] to make fatal misjudgements' (66), but their own malfeasance and incompetence: one character accidentally torches a car, killing himself, his partner and any hope for escape, and those that remain fall victim to their own interpersonal conflicts, too busy fighting each other to fend off the ghouls. There is no immediate causal link between media and the identities or existence of those that use it: it does not make its users into zombies nor does it, in and of itself, keep them from this fate. This, I will argue, is a task that is instead fielded by place.

The film's siege dynamic positions place at the centre of its tensions. Physically, place separates the human from the zombie. Practically speaking, it stops the zombie from making 'us' into 'them'. I will also argue that place *defines* the human in contrast to the zombie. For this I will draw on the work of humanist geographers Relph and Tuan, for whom 'place was seen as a universal and transhistorical part of the human condition[:] an idea, concept and way of being-in-the-world' (Cresswell 20). Thus, I will argue that the film elaborates an

¹ Writing with reference to the zombie movie in general, Cameron similarly suggests that 'any form of audiovisual mediation may be associated with the zombie film's representations of physical, social, and hermeneutical disorder' (68). Hervey also voices a similar sentiment, arguing that the television broadcast in *Night of the Living Dead* fails to 'pin down Establishment figures and resolve the truth' (77).

² Russo, the film's co-writer, noted that '[a] lot of critics have jumped off the deep end in likening the ghouls to the silent majority' (Russo qtd. in Hervey 24).

extended metaphor in which place in Romero's film both keeps and defines the human on physical, metaphysical and metaphorical levels.

Place will therefore *displace* the direct engagement between media and identity as is found in the analyses preceding this chapter. Nevertheless, I will argue that the connection between media and identity is present as it is routed *through* place. Television represents place within itself, deforms place around itself and, drawing Adam's essay "Television as Gathering Place", I will argue that it becomes a non-physical place all of its own.

To begin this analysis, it is first necessary to address the physical and metaphorical relationship between the human and the zombie in Romero's film. The zombie is that which people become, and it is accordingly no surprise that it is potentially analogous to any one of the numerous contemporary movements or issues reaching critical mass in the years surrounding *Night of the Living Dead's* release. Speculatively associated with dangerous levels of radiation, Romero's zombies recall a Cold War fear of nuclear attack and political insurrection; brought back to Earth by the 'Venus Probe', their radiological origin story calls to account the extension of Cold War animosities into the so-called 'Space Race'. At the same time, this mindless collective metaphorize Nixon's 'silent majority': they are simultaneously representatives of the average Americans returning dead or lifeless from the Vietnam War; or alternately, embody the Viet Cong against whom the notorious use of incendiary weapons is mirrored in the Sheriff's authoritative advice to 'pour gasoline on 'em' and set 'em on fire'.³ From a psychoanalytical perspective, they are simulacra of those whose Freudian 'illnesses' were 'suddenly made amenable to pharmaceutical intervention' in the form of prescription tranquilizers - a poignant image to the film's sixteen to twenty-four-year old baby-boomer audience and children of mothers who, as the Rolling Stone's 1966 hit put it, went 'running for the shelter of a mother's little helper'.⁴

Russo, the film's co-writer, decried commentators who made such connections (Hervey 24). This may not negate that the ghouls *were* likely understood in terms of their context, but it does raise an interesting point. If the ghoul can be read in terms of any number of the issues reaching critical mass around the time of its production, it is because they signify no one thing with any purposeful clarity. As one character would exclaim in *Dawn of the Dead*, the

³ Hervey draws a similar comparison between the film's sheriff, who coolly advises television audiences to 'shoot 'em [the ghouls] in the head', with Southern Vietnam's then chief of police, who famously shot dead a Viet Cong prisoner, Lem, in cold blood and on camera (22).

⁴ In light of the numerous psychoanalytic readings of the undead (for a paradigmatic example of which see Clark), it is surprising that none to this date have covered the pandemic of psychopharmaceuticals prescribed along gendered, Freudian psychoanalytic principles from the 1950s through to the 1970s (see Metz1). This reading is particularly consonant with *Night of the Living Dead*, in which the entire female cast is fatally anaesthetised.

point of the zombie is that 'they're us'. What they are is not a thing in itself but a variation on the human, and their poignancy as a monster is not therefore what they 'are' but the process of which they are the end result. If the zombie represents anything, it is change.

Representing change, the zombie is a blank slate ready and willing to be read in terms of any unwanted shape into which humans are becoming in context, but this representative value is always derivative. It always points towards the human of which the zombie is a modification, and this is more than ever the case in Romero's *Living Dead* series, because here the zombie is not a result of an external contagion that can be avoided or excised. His zombies' bites may be particularly lethal, but *anyone* who has died from *any* cause is destined to rise again. Romero's zombies are truly 'us', and accordingly, it is no surprise that human error is generally more of a threat than the ghoul in his movies. In his second feature, interpersonal conflict with a biker gang leads the film to its tragic end, whilst in his third it is the building tensions between soldiers and scientists, and, as already mentioned, whatever threat the living dead pose in *Night of the Living Dead* is made immaterial by the interpersonal conflict, misjudgement and sheer stupidity of those still thoroughly alive.

In Romero's films it is not a case of what the zombie has turned the human into but what the human has turned itself into, and this is true on both physical and metaphorical counts. It is the human's discordant behaviour that is responsible for the death and thereafter living death of most characters, just as it is that whatever social disorder the zombie represents is an extrapolation of the same social disorder evidenced by the living, who just so happen to form a societal cross-section of individuals of varying age, gender and ethnicity. The relationship between the human and the zombie can be reduced to the fact that each is a different point on the same spectrum: each one variations of the other, and the only thing maintaining what differences they exhibit is the place that stands between them.

Place physically divides the human from the zombie and provides physical protection to those seeking shelter within it. Its existence ensures theirs; as would its destruction do the same. This relationship is also reversible. Ghouls aimlessly tear at the house, and the only thing impeding their destructive efforts are those of the people seeking shelter within it. Thus, the survival of people and place is co-dependent, and I will argue that this symbiotic *physical* relationship is a metaphoric representation of a metaphysical equivalent.

Place has received substantial critical attention from humanist thinkers in the latter half of the twentieth century. Summarising this short but productive history, Cresswell states that 'that majority of writing about place focuses on the realm of meaning and experience. Place

is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power' (19).

The study of place as a human phenomenon is largely owed to the work of Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph (Cresswell 20). As the title of his seminal work, *Space and Place* (1977), suggests, Tuan's consideration of place begins at its tacit distinction to space:

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is a pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan 6)

In Tuan's distinctly social constructivist account, the focus is on the affective bond that people develop with place. Place here is not limited to notions of region or location, nor is it even to that within which we can 'place' ourselves. 'At one extreme a favorite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth' (149). A parent, or even only a breast, might be a place to a child (19-33). In the simplest of terms, places are 'centers of felt value' (4). Places are not their physical elements or geographies, but the meaning conferred on them - they are sites that are made meaningful *by* and are in turn meaningful *to* the human.

Relph follows a similar pattern of thought to Tuan, arguing that '[s]pace is amorphous and intangible' (8). However 'we feel or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or concept of place. In general it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places' (8). Again, place is space made intelligible, meaningful.

Relph roots his understanding of place in Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology. For Heidegger, the essence of being, or *Dasein*, is 'being-in-the-world': that we always exist in, and in relation to, the world around us. In other words, we are always *in place*.⁵

Accordingly, Relph states that 'the basic meaning of place ... does not ... come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from superficial or mundane experiences' (43). Rather, the 'essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of

⁵ Inwood summarises that 'Dasein and the world are not two distinct entities that can vary independently of each other. They are complementary.' (37).

human existence' (43). For Relph, places are not *only* sites of meaning, but sites in relation to which we exist meaningfully.

Concepts of authentic and inauthentic being permeate Heidegger's work, and it is no surprise therefore that they have filtered through to Relph's. If being-in-the-world, being in place, is a precondition for *authentic* being, then an *inauthentic* being must be placeless; or rather, it must exhibit an inauthentic relationship with the world in terms of what Relph calls 'placeless' places. These are places the identities of which are 'weaken[ed] ... to the point where they not only look alike and feel alike' but 'offer the same bland possibilities for experience' (Relph 90): supermarkets, airports or, on topic, shopping malls – places which could be anywhere. I will return to a more thorough discussion of Relph's 'placelessness', alongside the theorists that have followed in his wake and the relationships that these placeless places have with media technologies, later. For now I will remain on the defining, constructive, relationships between persons and place. As Relph succinctly puts it: [t]o be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place' (1).⁶

It is fitting then that place separates the human from the zombie, because to be a human is to be meaningfully and reciprocally engaged with place in contrast with the zombie who, aimlessly wandering and unengaged with the world around it, is essentially placeless.⁷ Thus, *Night of the Living Dead* establishes a complexly interwoven relationship between the human, the zombie and place. If the zombie is what the human might become, place restricts this potential as it divides the latter from the former on physical and metaphysical counts. As a physical barrier it physically protects the human from the zombie, whilst also

⁶ The ideas of Relph and Tuan have been developed by a host of critics who see place less as a site imbued with meaning, the interrelation of two static phenomenon, than a phenomenon that 'is constituted through reiterative social practice' (Cresswell 39). Concentrating on our 'everyday movement in space' (qtd. in Cresswell 33), Seamon suggests that places are less sites of meaning than a production in motion. As he understands them, places are 'performed on a daily basis through people living their everyday life' (Cresswell 34). Similarly, Pred argues that '[p]laces are never "finished" but always "becoming"' (Cresswell 35). Drawing on structurationist notions – being the interplay between 'overarching structures that influence our lives ... and our own ability to exercise agency' (Cresswell 20) – he suggests that places have structure: a pattern of use, but that this use is not inviolable. Thus the significance of any place is always a process of change. This inexhaustive survey gives an overview of the critical backdrop against which the term place is framed. Nevertheless, I will draw on the work of Relph and Tuan, principally because their social constructivist positions describe a connection between persons and place that mirrors the physical co-dependence found between the two in *Night of the Living Dead*.

⁷ This point would be brought out in explicit detail in Romero's 2005 *Land of the Dead*, where a group of survivors refuse to fire on an army of zombies marching on an abandoned city for the reason that 'they're just looking for a place to go', the inference being that a zombie, meaningfully engaging its world *vis-à-vis* place, ceases to be a threat. Presumably, this is because a zombie meaningfully engaging its world ceases to be a zombie, becoming more 'us' than 'them'.

metaphysically marking and maintaining its inhabitants *as* humans and in contrast to the zombie. Accordingly, place is a metric for its inhabitants. Its welfare is in concert with theirs. Without place, the human is doomed to become the zombie, and, without the human, place is doomed to destruction by the zombie. Therefore, the state of place is a measure of its inhabitants and the fate of their human selves.

The film's specific place in question, however, is no place to be. It is entirely unfit to weather the ghouls' attacks, and this is unsurprising given the specific connotations that the particular place in question, a Pennsylvanian farmhouse, has in context. From its plot through to its film-stock, *Night of the Living Dead* evinces a distinctly 1950s atmosphere (Hervey 29), and the film's farmhouse compliments this ambiance, recalling the idealization of rural life in post-war America. However, it was a way of life which was incongruent with the changing social mores of the film's late 1960s setting, its redundancy visualised in the house's dead proprietor who, found entirely dead and decomposing, fell victim to time, not the ghoul. Thus, the farmhouse is physically and metaphorically inadequate to brave the unfolding situation: it is incapable of enduring the ghouls' attacks, just as it was the socio-cultural change they embody. The objective of the film is therefore to repurpose this outmoded place as befits the exigencies of the immediate physical and metaphorical situation, or else leave it behind: to enact a catalytic change before the farmhouse and the lives of those still holding out within it are cannibalised by the zombies outside its doors.

Characters attempt to enact this change, splitting into two distinct groups each of which are intent on realizing their own ideas on how to best reconfigure the house's space: one group, led by Ben, attempts to board up the ground floor; the other, led by Harry, deciding to barricade themselves in the basement. Divided, however, their attempts are futile. The house is unnaturally cleft in two. Its furniture is broken down and tacked to windows and doors, or else burned on the front lawn, in a demonstration that the semiotic value of the house as place is destroyed by their efforts. However, there is no constructive resolution to this change. Doors shoddily affixed to windows and an armchair burning on the lawn constitute a poor defensive perimeter and suggest, in their confusing arrangement, a hermeneutic chaos not unlike that of the zombies into which the house's inhabitants will change as a result of this futile defensive gesture.

This point is underscored by Romero's expressive cinematography, the erratic camera-work of which hacks up the house into disarticulate pieces as it flits between obscure, canted camera angles. Romero himself describes his style as not unlike a 'jigsaw puzzle[]' ("Filming *Night*" 14): scenes captured from a multitude of angles and then pieced back together. By this cinematographic approach, each piece of the puzzle gets its airtime, the scene and its

components relayed to the audience piecemeal. However, the camera rarely pulls back to reveal the whole picture, and as such it obfuscates a comprehensive understanding of the house's physical and semiotic geographies.

Each character's intention for the house is a clear expression of their representative social standings. Harry, the archetypal member of the conservative 'silent majority': white, middle-aged and unhappily married, is following government-sanctioned Cold War routine by hiding in the basement. Whereas Ben, a young black bachelor representative of everything Harry is not, attempts to fight his ground by enacting proactive change. However, before the interpretative leap is made that Harry's reluctance to assist in Ben's proactive change is the root of their downfall, it pays to remember that Harry's strategy *was* the most effective. It is only by hiding in the basement that Ben is able to survive the night. However, apportioning the blame is beyond the point. It is not *what* or *whose* options they choose, but that they do not choose it together. If the values of place are engaged in a mutually affirming relationship with their users, it is only fitting that this fractious ambience translates to a fractured house. So long as place is reciprocally engaged with its users, to change the house's geography requires that its inhabitants change themselves.

It is at this juncture that television comes into play. It is only at its discovery that characters abandon their individual pursuits and territorial claims as they gather in the living room, formerly Ben's territory, to watch television together. As they gather about the television their attitudes to one another change, their hostility temporarily ceases and with it so do their territorial attitudes to place. Ben makes a pretence of control as he reminds Harry that, 'if you stay up here, you take orders from me'; however, obliging Harry's request to fix the television's antennae only moments later, it is clear that this pretence is entirely hollow. With the television's appearance the territorial divide that had hitherto bifurcated the house disappears, and these changing configurations of space are represented in Romero's expressive cinematography. Once the television has been discovered the film's previously fidgety camera settles down to slower, longer and more conventional shots, and as it pulls back it reveals a coherent image of the physical and metaphysical geographies of the film's farmhouse.

Television alters how characters engage one another and as it does so it alters how they engage place, and *vice versa*. To understand why, the self-evident first port-of-call is in the advice and information of its broadcast content, which actively sets its audience on trajectories towards new, supposedly safe places. As I explained earlier, the prevailing critical consensus is that television in *Night of the Living Dead* is a source of virulent misinformation, a point which Hervey has explicitly associated with the contemporary

counterculture movement (77). It is definitely the case that, in context, television was a politicized and largely unreliable source of information, decried by the counterculture as at best ineffectual, at worst damaging. However, the advice and information that television provides *in the film* is relatively innocuous, in part because that advice *was* both truthful and effective, but largely because whatever dangers it posed are undercut by the behaviour of those who attempt to follow it.⁸

It is not, however, my aim to place the film's representation of television in terms of the oppositional logic of American counterculture in 1960s. My point is that current criticism has extrapolated context *into* the film. Understanding that the politicization of television and its incapacity to provide impartial information were hot topics of the time, current criticism has looked to how this may or may not be the case in Romero's movie: how the information and advice its television provides is or is not partial, politicized and negatively influential. By reverse engineering this context, critics have not only distorted the film's content: they have missed that the value of the television broadcast is more than the quality and veracity of the information and advice it provides.

In Hervey's analysis of what he argues are the film's countercultural sentiments towards television, he draws specific attention to the 'Washington sequence', a news segment in which a government scientist begins explaining the radiological origins of the ghoul before being prematurely curtailed by a military official. Hervey is not wrong to suggest a parallel between this fictional newscast and contemporary war reports: the journalists of which are unable to 'pin down Establishment figures and resolve the truth' (77). Whether or not this comparison satirizes broadcast's *complicity* in toeing government lines, as Hervey argues is the case, is another matter entirely,⁹ but it is a matter that obfuscates the bigger picture. The advice and information provided in this sequence, however ineffectual it may or may not be, is second in importance to the image of Washington D.C., the capital and neighbour state, which is weathering the undead outbreak seemingly unharmed.

⁸ On that note, if one *is* to read the film's treatment of broadcast in context, it might more reasonably be suggested that *Night of the Living Dead* critiques an *overreliance* on media, not media itself. In context, civil defence propaganda touted television as a 'one size fits all' measure in case of public emergency: capable of explaining and resolving whatever crisis might befall the American public. Hervey claims that the film questions this level of reliance (76-77), but whereas he suggests that the film apportion blame to the inaccurate reportage of events, I would suggest that the film shows that, in case of national emergency, television will only ever be as good as those that use it.

⁹ I would argue that broadcast journalism is not portrayed as the government's obedient lapdog, since television is shown to be capable of and willing to expose the truth of the situation against the wish of the government official present.

In keeping with the film's presiding metaphors of place, broadcast content in the film is significant for the places it represents: places of relative order and safety in a world cast into chaos. The safety of these represented places might not be transmitted to those that view them, but so long as places are sites of meaning reciprocally engaged with persons, their significance is. The Washington sequence, for example, is significant for the meaning that its represented place confers to those that view it. Emblematic of the nation, footage of Washington D.C. summons up larger notions of national place: a nation through common membership to which characters are bound to each other as well as to its laws and customs. If characters abandon their territorial disputes to gather about the television and thereafter engage in comparatively co-operative behaviours until broadcast ceases, it is because broadcast's representation of place confers meaning to those that view it, putting characters' territorial ambitions into perspective and reminding them of their commonalities.

To expand, a similar point can be made of the film's newsroom, where an anchorman speaks in a calm, metered tone that is set to match with the metronomic tapping of machinery and typists in the background. It is a *mise-en-scène* that impresses the sense of an ordered, almost mechanical logic, and a logic that I suggest is transfused into the characters that watch it. Footage of the television is shot from sheer 90 degree angles, which for Hervey signals television's 'extraneous[ness] to the main action' (78), its ineffectuality. However, Romero's extensive use of eye-line match cuts in this sequence make sure that the camera is understood as an *ad hoc* representative of characters' intentions, and these head-on shots are therefore clear indicators that, as characters engage the television, their patterns of thought become regulated: stabilized.

Whatever advice and information television's content provides is second to the places it represents: safe, organized places that put characters' meagre territorial disputes in perspective by showing that better places still stand and that the attendant values of these places stand with them. The vicarious experience of these places, as Relph might say, helps characters to 'know their place in the world'. They confer meaning to characters where it is otherwise stripped from their immediate surroundings, and in doing so reconfigure their understanding of the world around them, their place within it and their relation to others similarly placed.

Television's content, however, is not all it has to offer. The mere knowledge of its existence is sufficient in itself to negotiate a temporary peace in the film: to encourage co-operative behaviour and settle Romero's camera into a standard cinematic grammar. 'By 1960, nine out of ten Americans owned sets, watching an average five hours daily: television had become the nation's dominant source of information, the hub of its worldview' (Hervey

76).¹⁰ Television effectively changed the way that the American public understood their world. Furthermore, as its popularization came in tandem with a mass exodus of the white middle classes from cities to the suburbs, it also participated in a re-orientation of domestic space, the television-equipped living-room supplanting the city centre as entertainment hub (Marc and Thompson 54; Edgerton 92). Life had become ever television-centric, ordered around and rationalized through the burgeoning medium. *Night of the Living Dead* captures this ethos.

In the film, the mere presence of the television-*set* is sufficient in itself to reconfigure character's attitudes because, as the definitive piece of living room furniture, it lends definition to the space around it. The television set is a visual signifier of what that space 'is'. Thus indexed, the space becomes legible to the camera, which settles down into a standardized cinematic grammar, overriding characters' previous territorial demarcations and encouraging its communal use as what is, in context, aptly termed living space. In essence, television generates place around it. This thought is nascent in *Night of the Living Dead*, underdeveloped and only vaguely felt. However, it would be revisited in vivid detail in the film's sequel, *Dawn of the Dead*, where, once a television is planted in, of all places, the stock room of an abandoned shopping mall, an elaborate living quarter grows around it. However, in both films, whatever sense of place it generates only lasts as long television's broadcast. As broadcast ceases in *Dawn of the Dead*, its characters cease to find their *ad hoc* home so homely, and, disillusioned, prefer to leave the mall's relative safety in pursuit of quite literally anything else; whilst in *Night of the Living Dead*, Ben and Harry revive their old conflicts and the film reverts to its previous hermeneutic chaos of expressionistic lighting and disorientating cinematography.

The significance of this is that whatever symbolic purpose the television fulfils, it is clearly secondary to that of broadcast itself, and whilst I have already suggested that the *content* of broadcast plays an important role in the film, I conjecture that the very *fact* of broadcast is pivotal in the tentative harmony established at the point of the television's discovery. Television, after all, is not its constituent paraphernalia, nor the ephemera of its content. It is neither its thin-film transistor, or in context its cathode ray tube, nor is it the images that these technologies produce. Television is an emergent phenomena; it is the epiphenomenal product of the networked body of broadcasters and viewers and all in between, nodes to which television owes its existence but to which it is at the same time irreducible. It is the

¹⁰ Similar claims are made by Spigel and Curtin and Marc and Thompson.

common ground they share between them, and this common ground might be otherwise described as a place.

This is a potentially contentious point: not least because of the natural predisposition to understand place, as the term is ordinarily used in ordinary life, in terms of the physical, but also because popular theorists of place have repeatedly associated television and other electronic media technologies with a growing sense of placelessness. Relph, for instance, argues that:

Mass media conveniently provide simplified and selective identities for places beyond the realm of immediate experience of the audience, and hence tend to fabricate a pseudo-world of pseudo-places. And someone exposed to these synthetic identities and stereotypes will almost inevitably be inclined to experience actual places in terms of them – a fact not missed by the developers of such real-life pseudo places as Waikiki or Disneyland. (Relph 58)

His argument is that media-technologies produce inauthentic places. In terms of the Heideggerian thought in which his ideas are based, this inauthentic attitude to place results in the inauthenticity of those that use it.

Relph is not alone in expressing this negative sentiment regarding the interactions between electronic media technologies and place. Meyrowitz argues that '[e]lectronic media affect us ... by changing the 'situational geography' of social life' (Meyrowitz 6). Behaviours, he argues, change from situation to situation, and Meyrowitz contends that electronic media impact behaviour by 'rearrange[ing] ... the social stages on which we play our roles' (4). He argues that 'electronic media create new placeless situations that have no traditional patterns of behavior' (146).

To borrow Meyrowitz' example, 'New York executives who fly to California ... expect to do business "California style" while there' (146). Their behaviours are expected to conform to the dictate of that place. Whereas, '[w]hen New York and Californian business executive[s] "meet" via video conferencing, they behave in a mixture of Californian and New York style that is both yet neither' (146). There is no unified sense of place at their point of contact, and therefore no place to guide their actions.

Not all theorists have characterised this changing geography in terms of inauthentic or disorientating experience. Whereas Relph describes placeless places, Augé instead coins the term *non-places*. Non-places are defined against what Augé calls *anthropological place*: the 'idea of a culture localized in time and space' (Augé 34). 'If place can be defined as

relational, historical and concerned with identity,' he argues, 'then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place' (77-78).

These are 'spaces of circulation (freeways, airways), consumption (department stores, supermarkets), and communication (telephones, faxes, television, cable networks)', 'spaces where people coexist or cohabit without living together' (Augé qtd. in Cresswell 45).

This differentiation does not carry with it the negative connotations of Relph's distinction. It is not measured in loaded terms of authenticity, but of experiential difference. 'Augé's arguments force theorists of culture to reconsider the theory and method of their disciplines. While conventionally figured place demand thoughts which reflect assumed boundaries and traditions, non-places demand new mobile ways of thinking' (Cresswell 46).

Augé is not alone in moving beyond the moral paradigms of earlier theorists. Whereas Meyrowitz suggested that electronic media uproot their user from place and the significance it bears on their existence, Scannel argues that they produce a 'doubling of place' (qtd. in Moores 21). Drawing on Scannel, Moore similarly argues 'for a conception of place as pluralized (not marginalized, as Meyrowitz would have it) by electronic media use' (23).

My understanding of the interactions between electronic media and place however, is drawn directly from Adams' 1992 article, "Television as Gathering Place". Understanding places as 'center[s] of meaning' and 'social context[s]' (117), Adams argues that television is equally a place inasmuch as it 'serve[s] various social and symbolic functions previously served by [traditional] places: sensory communion, social congregation, the attribution of value to persons and objects, and the definition of an "us" and a "them"' (130). This is not to say that it was knowingly understood and interacted with as place by *Night of the Living Dead's* original audience, just as it is not understood as place now. Rather, my point is that, notwithstanding how television was and is rationalized, it was and is *experienced* as place, as long as it 'serve[s] various social and symbolic functions previously served by [traditional] places' (130).

On this basis, it might be termed a 'non-physical place', and the importance of this in context is that, in contrast to the film's farmhouse, television is a place that is fundamentally inaccessible to and incorruptible by the physically predisposed zombie. The evidential basis of this conclusion is something of a conundrum, for it is drawn by the lack of evidence to the contrary. The ghoul's incapacity to interact with television is implicitly evidenced by that they do not exhibit behaviours to the contrary, and thus this conclusion falls victim to the aphorism that the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence. However, a similar idea would be resurrected in explicit detail in Romero's third sequel, *Day of the Dead*, where

a captive zombie, Bub, is subjected to various media in tentative steps to reprogram his humanity. Bub is submitted to a process of re-registration' (Cameron 69) which figures a 'zombie [that] is not simply remade through media but also functions itself like a type of medium' (70). However, function is an inappropriate descriptor, for although Bub stores *some* data, he is severely limited in both the capacity and integrity with which he does so, barely capable of accurately registering and repeating the simplest of movements. Whilst Bub is nonetheless legible as a scathing remark on the mindless 'zombie' consumer whose empty mind is simply waiting to be filled, he is also a reminder that the capacity to engage media separates the human from the zombie in the latter's incapacity to use it.

Bub looks at a book,¹¹ holds it in his hands and rifles through its pages. He is close to it and experiences it in some capacity, but his experience is somehow invalid. He experiences the book, but he does not experience it *as a book*, as a vestige of meaning, a window into what may be aptly termed another world encoded in systems of language and literary custom. What this reveals is that the relationship with media is only ever satisfactorily complete, valid, so much as it is one of engagement, of reaching beyond its physical point of contact with the world to the meaning referenced within but apart from its physical components, a capacity that the zombie does not possess.

Of course, a book is not the same as television, but I suggest that the preconditions of their access are similar. This point would be championed some years later in Charlie Brooker's 2008 mini-series, *Dead Set*, which if distanced in time and authorship from Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* is a nonetheless valuable comparator in terms of the cognitive capacities of the zombies that they share between them. In an intertextual nod to Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, Brooker's series ends in an abandoned shopping mall, where one zombie, staring blankly at a television, meets the gaze of another whose stare has been accidentally recorded and broadcast by a television studio that has continued recording in the absence of its once human inhabitants. *Dead Set* visualises 'zombie television' *in potentia*: a fully-fledged system of television by zombies, for zombies, of zombies. Yet, although the necessary actors are in the right place at the right time, the very accidental nature of their positioning suggests that something is not right with their experience. They are looking at television's points of access, at the television camera and the television receiver, but, similar to Bub before them, they never break these preliminary boundaries to perceive the notional world that lies behind and between them: as their gazes theoretically meet, no connection is made.

¹¹ The book in question is Stephen King's vampire novel, *Salem's Lot*, an intertextual nod to the fact that the undead's origins are, as discussed in my introduction, not to be found in the voodoo-zombie, but in the vampire.

To engage with television is not merely to look at a screen or through a camera. It is to look past its mediating technologies to the conceptual whole strung between them. Television is a site of meaning that is only meaningful so long as it is meaningfully perceived, and it is only meaningfully perceived so long as it is perceived as a mutual object of perception, perceived as perceived by others. The inference of this is that as a place, as a site of meaning, television is fundamentally incorruptible by the ghoul, whose access is restricted by their cognitive deficiencies. It is, like the places it represents, a safe place in an unsafe world, a place in relation to which characters might define themselves as meaningfully placed per the film's overarching metaphor linking persons and place and zombies and placelessness. Being thus placed, however, also implies that its users are meaningfully engaged with each other: allied in the shared perception and hence construction of this non-physical place, a point which is visualised in the arrangement of the film's characters, a representative cross-section of society, gathered about the television set in a mutated semblance of the nuclear family, figuring a society related through its common engagement with television.

In previous chapters I have suggested that the texts analysed forwarded a direct ontological connection between media and identity, a point that I will take up again in the next chapter. Here I have argued that media in *Night of the Living Dead*, specifically television, is foremost connected with the creation of place in and around itself. Issues of place are important points of Gothic fiction across the board, and play substantial roles in each of the texts previously analysed. *Dracula's* invasion narrative is caught up in notions of national places, their citizens and their interaction; *I am Legend* revolves about the fortification of a family home which its owner refuses to leave at the cost of his life. Yet, the values of place were foregrounded in analyses of neither. By contrast, in *Night of the Living Dead* place is not only important, but unavoidable. It is sewn into the film's physical and metaphorical fabric as the main point of plot development and the only physical, metaphysical and metaphorical factor separating the living from the undead.

Writing at the same time as the film's release, Foucault outlined the idea of the *heterotopia*: places which are experienced locally but which extend into supra-physical domains – for example, the world within the mirror or, closer in style to the non-physical places described in this analysis, behind the cinema-screen (*Other Spaces* 4-6). This model of analysis was indicative of its time: the contemporary epoch was 'above all the epoch of space': of 'simultaneity' and 'juxtaposition' as new technologies combined and confused the 'near and far', the 'side-by-side' (*Other Spaces* 1). By the 1960s, television had already reached critical mass in American contexts. Whether or not it was perceived to be a malign force, its

popularity altered the ways in which its users understood the world around them and their roles within it, and *Night of the Living Dead* captures this change.

Chapter 4

Media-Zombies and Zombie-Media: Media Identity and Mediated Identity in the Found-Footage Zombie Movie

The undead have proliferated since Romero's landmark *Living Dead* series, surfacing in an impressive number of texts in various guises, but of all of these it is the modern 'infected', as popularized in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, that represents the next evolutionary step in the undead's developing global tradition. Unlike their meandering predecessors, the infected sprint towards their victims. Their attacks are unpredictable and escalate almost immediately, and their rise to popularity therefore altered the ways in which the undead's defining existential state was commonly experienced. It might therefore appear odd that their point of origin will not be the subject of this dissertation's final case study. However, it is my opinion that their slight alteration to the ways in which undeath was expressed and experienced is only a marginal part of a greater systemic change found within the fictions that contain them, a change which is found in the changing media forms and narrative modes through which the undead are commonly engaged.

As the infected sprint towards their victims, and by affiliation their audiences, they are abetted in their efforts by the proclivity of their most popular fictions to be expressed in the multisensory mediums of film, television and videogames, and at the same time as these mediating technologies bring the undead ever closer to their audiences, the narrative modes employed within them inch their audiences ever closer to the undead. The recent popularity of the undead zombie videogame exemplifies this point, the format of which is premised entirely on the incorporation of its player into its diegesis. However, it is the recent proliferation of the found-footage zombie movie to which I will turn for the final case study of this dissertation: notable examples of which include *[REC]* (2007), *Diary of the Dead* (2008), *Quarantine* (2008), *[REC]2* (2009), and *V/H/S/2* (2013). All of these films at once extrude themselves towards their audiences by positioning themselves as an artefact in their audience's world, and at the same time open up their own internal reality through immersive, first person perspectives.

Very little criticism currently exists on these films. Rowan-Legg, Keetley and, to a degree, Cameron, are the only ones to analyse them in anything approaching a level of detail. Shelagh Rowan-Legg looks the first two *[REC]* films as examples of post-national genre cinema. She explains that '[p]ost-national genre cinema might be entirely national in production and theme, but it uses semantics that are not nationally specific to tell a story' (214). 'The films *[REC]* and *[REC] 2*, written and directed by Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza,' she continues, 'use the horror genre through the mode of found footage, which is non-nationally specific, and contextualize it through an examination of Spanish television and social tensions' (214). Specifically, she suggests that these films' 'zombies raise anxiety over the effects of tabloid television, and the public's insatiable appetite for seemingly superficial stories, growing transnational media and spectacle' (217).

Keetley, on the other hand, has turned her attention to *Diary of the Dead*. 'The contagion signified by the zombies in *Diary of Dead*,' she argues, 'is not the contagiousness of raw violence - the mimetic transference of *brutality* between zombie and human' (n.pag). Rather, she suggests that 'the zombie signifies the contagion of *images*' (n.pag). The film's zombies, she argues, 'are media images' that 'mobilize the outcomes of own reckless embrace of technology' (n.pag).

Although speaking across a broader range of zombie movies in general, Cameron has touched upon some of the films analysed here in a similar manner to both Keetley and myself, and I will return to his work throughout this chapter. In brief, however, Cameron argues that '[u]nderlying the most sophisticated examples of the zombie subgenre is a highly developed media ontology, in which the zombie body and the "body" of the medium are metaphorically connected in a reversible relationship' (67). This 'ontological thread', he suggests, runs parallel to an 'associated media phenomenology, in which pleasures and fears associated with the breakdown of media are channelled through the spectacle of the disintegrating zombie body' (67).

By its nature, the found-footage style draws attention to its own media form and the processes of its own production, and in doing so I will argue that these films draft a phenomenology of film within themselves. I will expand this point by reading these films' *de facto* theorisations in parallel with Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological film theory, showing that the found-footage zombie movie presents film as its own film-subject: an anthropomorphized perspective that explores the limits of its own diegesis with human-like intentionality. Animated by a diegetic cameraman, the identity of this film-subject is purposefully confused for that of its diegetic filmmaker. However, the two are never equated. Film, in these films, is its *own* subjectivity: its identity only ever *confused* for its

maker's. Film is the epiphenomenal result of its maker's interaction with its mediating technologies, and the resultant subjectivity therefore lives an undead life: a life that feeds on another's existence in the creation of its own. Thus the found-footage movie figures a zombie-medium, inhabited by a film-subject whose identity is a mutated abstraction of its cannibalized filmmaker's. This figuration of zombie-media equally implies that of the media-zombie: a subject whose existence is metaphorically cannibalized in the production of the film.¹ Found-footage zombie films operate this bilateral metaphor of zombie-media and media-zombies, and through it they question the extent to which persons are stripped of their identity by the media that infect their worlds and the value of identities forged by, through and in them.

Although this analysis will eventually expand to cover other influential fictions of the undead that adopt similar found-footage styles, I begin with a close reading of Balaguero and Plaza's 2007 *[REC]*, the first substantial and most influential offering of its kind.² *[REC]* follows a reporter, Ángela, and her cameraman Pablo, who, unfortunately trapped in an apartment block in which a virus is transforming residents into *de facto* zombies, resolve to record the unfolding events. As in the found-footage style, the film is that which Pablo is able to record. It is its own auto-genesis, and it constantly reminds its audience of this fact. Even before its beginning, its title, stylized [*•REC*] with a red interpoint, references the process of recording, and this emphasis does not abate within the film itself, where fictional retakes, audio-visual glitches and Angela's incessant demand that Pablo record everything constantly return attentions to the fact that the film is its own production in motion.

[REC]'s focus on its own media form is not out of the ordinary. Zombie films, so Cameron argues, are often 'notable for the visibility of their material form[s]', a point he suggests runs from the 'rough and grainy high-contrast 35mm of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)' through to 'the pixelated digital video of Danny Boyle's quasi-zombie film *28 Days Later* (2002)' (Cameron 72). He argues that:

Media are overlaid with bodily metaphors and are viewed as vulnerable, like human bodies, to aging, disease, and dismemberment. ... In zombie films, bodies are menaced by contingent encounters with the undead but also by the contingent signs

¹ Cameron has employed this term in reference to the metaphorical parity he espies between zombies and their media: the zombie's imperfect reanimation representing that of the media that contain them. To disambiguate, I use the term in its commonplace reference to persons made 'zombies' by media-overdependence.

² It should be noted that *[REC]* is not the first found-footage zombie movie. *The Zombie Diaries*, a British film released in 2006, one year before Balaguero and Plaza's movie, takes this title. However, *The Zombie Diaries* lacked both the influence and critical reception of *[REC]*.

of mediation, including film grain, color shifts, distortion, dropped frames, and digital artifacts. Media's capacity for capturing, transmitting, and reproducing contingency is connected with a loss of meaning and order which also plays out across human bodies. (88)

The visibility of the zombie film's material form elaborates a metaphorical parity between the zombie film and its respective zombies: the decaying flesh of one mirrored in the other as each are disfigured by the processes of their own imperfect (re)animation.

This reading might also be applied to *[REC]*, the cinematic flesh of which is equally deformed by the highly visible processes of its own production. Masquerading as 'raw' footage, the film is purposefully tarnished with audio-visual artefacts that would be ordinarily removed in post-production, and it lacks in the standard cinematic sensibility ordinarily added. There are no cuts to guide a viewer's experience of the film, which, limited to a single camera and the limited capacities of its one filmmaker often lags behind the action, incapable of consistently getting a clear shot. The net result is a film whose cinematic flesh is scarred and whose body hopelessly stumbles through the world it describes, figuring a breakdown of signification in a mirror of what Cameron argues is the decaying significance of the undead zombie's body.

Cameron's analysis, however, operates on the understanding that the undead 'function as stand-ins for mortality itself', that they are death's 'hypertrophic fulfilment'(81). Cameron conceptualizes undeath as a mobile visualization of decay in motion, 'a movement towards and through death' which is 'mirrored by a movement away from sense and order'(82). This study, however, does not.

Rather, and as I have argued in my introductory chapter, this study conceptualizes undeath as an equally constructive process. It is a new life born from death, but confused with the life and death of the person from which it was born and whose body it now calls home. This distinction does not void Cameron's claim as to the metaphorical parity between the undead and their media. The zombie-film's worn cinematic-flesh nevertheless metaphorizes the physical deterioration of its zombies' bodies. The zombie's deteriorating body, however, is not limited to the representation of the 'loss of meaning and order'(88), and neither therefore is the film's. The zombie's decaying body might at once represent a loss of significance, the absence of their body's once human owners, but this same decay concurrently signifies as something new, that body's zombie inhabitant. Thus, the zombie's body at once figures a subtraction and addition of value. It figures a *transformation* of value, and I suggest that the same can be said of the zombie film's deformed cinematic flesh.

Night of the Living Dead's grainy film, for example, might at once represent the incapacity of film to capture the world it represents without a loss or deterioration of meaning, as visualized in its literal spots of missing visual data. However, as much as this film grain marks an absence, it simultaneously marks an addition. It is a purposeful consequence of Romero's use of outdated film-stock, and its use adds meaning on visual, connotative and metaphoric levels. It adds to the film's distinctly 1950s ambiance, and reifies the filmic medium's zombie-like qualities in terms of old-film stock revived a decade after its obsolescence – the 'dead' reanimated (Hervey 26, 29).

The notion that the zombie film's scarred cinematic flesh metaphorizes the constructive decay of its respective zombies is epitomized in their transmedia relatives, zombie videogames, which often mimic the signs of cinema's imperfect reanimation. *Left 4 Dead* (2008), for example, synthesises film-grain and vignetting in post-processing in order to tarnish its own flawless, digital 'footage'. Here, however, these signs of mediation are not the passive result of its medium's incapacity to capture an image without a loss of information. They are active additions: post-effects which at once strip the image of clarity and the order and reason that attend it, but only because they add something, because they change the game and give it new, specifically cinematic, meaning.

As Cameron argues, the visibility of the zombie film's media form *does* establish a metaphorical parity between the undead and their media. However, in an advance on Cameron, I argue that this similarity is not limited to the co-ordinated figuration of loss. Instead, the scarred flesh of each are united in their mutual figuration of loss as gain: value which is not merely subtracted and destroyed but abstracted and changed – made into something new. Thus, the metaphorical connection between the zombie and their media is not limited to the signification of their physical constituents, but extends to the metaphysical conditions of their existence. In drawing attention to their marked cinematic flesh, zombie movies reveal how the mediating processes behind their media forms inflect and alter the reality they (re)present in an undead-type transformation.

This point is particularly pronounced in the found-footage movie, which internalises the processes of its own fictional production and, in doing so, demonstrates the discrepancy between the world that it creates and the world it claims to describe. *[REC]*, for example, begins with a series of 'retakes' in which Ángela attempts to perfect her introductory segment for a fictional documentary, and each take's difference to the other suggests that film is only ever a version of the world it describes, the film's reality inflected by the creative impetus of its mediating processes. *[REC]* thereby describes its own media form as akin to the undead it contains: the life-in-motion that it represents as abstracted and mutated

from the world it records and made into something new, a zombie like form that, with each extra take, repeats in stumbling reiterations of the same limited actions.

The undeathliness of this media form is evinced with unparalleled clarity in the sequence in which Ángela and Pablo rewind and rewatch the footage of the first zombie shot dead on camera, a process that occurs in and as the film.³ Here, film figuratively reanimates the dead, reviving the terminated zombie and restoring a reality-in-motion that has already ‘passed’. Viewed for a second time, however, it is clear that the film’s reality is distanced from the world it recorded. As the same footage repeats, it suddenly feels extraneous to the action, and occurring in and as the film this repeated footage actively obscures the reality of the film’s world which is at the same time occurring somewhere in the diegetic periphery.

In focalising its own production, *[REC]* visualises its own ‘documentative’ media-product as an undeathly abstraction on the reality it claims to describe. Its footage is taken from that world, but once taken becomes something new: the discrepancy between the two marked, as in the zombie, in the film’s disfigured flesh and stumbling, repetitive motion. Film in *[REC]* is an undeathly product. However, *[REC]*’s focus on its own production does more than call to account the undeathly metaphysics of its filmic self. By virtue of the found-footage style, this undeathly media roams the world it produces, and as it does so it visualises a distinctly phenomenological conception of the film experience – by which I mean to state that it not only conceptualises the significance of itself, but the processes of which it is a result and the roles and relationships of those that engage it.

To expand, I will draw upon Vivian Sobchack’s phenomenological account of film. The central tenant of phenomenology is that consciousness is always directed, or *intended*, towards something: it ‘is never “empty” and “in-itself”, but rather always intending toward and in relation to an object’ (*Address* 18). Naturally therefore, Sobchack begins her account of the film experience with the viewer ‘immersed in a world of visual being’ (*Address* 8) as they direct their attention toward the film.

This relationship between film and audience, however, is not, as she says, a ‘monologic one between a viewing subject and a viewed object’ (*Address* 23). Film, she argues, is not only a ‘*visible* and *viewed object*’, but is also a ‘*viewing subject*’ (*Address* 21-22). It is itself an ‘act of viewing’ (*Address* 26), or as Sobchack refers to it, a *viewing-view*: a subject whose

³ That the audience sees this replay in spite of the fact that the act of re-watching does not entail re-recording is more than likely a technical oversight in its production. It is, nonetheless, an important sequence in the film, its own confusion stimulating the confused ontologies that *[REC]* describes.

perception is expressed as film.⁴ Put simply, film as an ‘an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood’ (*Address* 3-4).

Daniel Frampton contends that ‘[p]henomenological metaphors of human perception ... limit the meaning possibilities of film’ in that, in their remit, the ‘camera’ becomes ‘another character’ (7). In this, he is entirely correct: phenomenological accounts of film *do* risk an over-simplistic parallelism between film and human consciousness. However, this anthropomorphized vision of film is a foundational aspect of the found-footage style which, like Sobchack’s theoretical account, visualises film as the expressive perception of a mobile view that navigates its world with a human-like motion and intentionality, its mediating technologies existing *alongside* the film’s characters. Thus, in figuring film as its own fictional production, the found-footage style actualizes a phenomenological model of film within itself, visualising Sobchack’s viewing-view in terms of its anthropomorphized first-person perspective.

Given that this film-subject, this viewing-view, is animated by the efforts of its diegetic cameraman, who is almost always where the camera is, seeing what it sees as he points it towards the objects of his own intention, it is only a short analytical step to the conclusion that if the resultant film is an expression of perception, it is the expression of *Pablo’s* perception. The film moves like Pablo, traversing and engaging its world as Pablo does, its mediating technology moving with him. Rightly or not, the film clearly signifies as Pablo; however, in spite of their similarities, the film’s perspective and Pablo’s – its subjectivity and his – are not therefore the same.

This distinction is clearly elaborated by the multiple points at which the film’s perspective and Pablo’s separate, as when the camera is held by Ángela or lies on the floor, and it is comprehensively confirmed by the aforementioned sequence in which Pablo and Ángela rewind and rewatch the footage that they have just recorded. Because the film simultaneously rewinds as the film and in the film, *its* perspective cannot be Pablo’s, because within the film’s internal chronology Pablo is himself watching this footage in a position similar to the audience’s. As this footage repeats, the film’s perspective is *similar* to Pablo’s. It looks *like* his. However, watched by him *within* the film, the film’s perspective is other than his own.

⁴ Rudimentarily put, Sobchack’s conception of the film experience is ‘the perception ... of ... expression ... and/as the expression ... of ... perception’ (*Address* 18-19).

It might reasonably be proposed therefore that the film's perspective is that of the camera's, given that whatsoever passes through it, including even its own medium of record, becomes part of the film. However, the very same sequences that distinguish the film's perspective from Pablo's suggest a similar distinction between the film's perspective and its camera's.

A point in case is a sequence in which the camera, turned off and on the floor, is restored to life by an inquisitive child. The scene opens to an extreme close-up of a child's face, upside-down and lit by intermittent bursts of yellow emergency lighting, and this chaotic *mise-en-scène* continues as the child is ushered away and the camera continues to record out-of-focus visuals and boxy, barely comprehensible audio. At one point, the child reaches her finger towards the camera's lens. She makes contact, but the camera is incapable of voicing a response. All that is heard is a low rustle as its internal microphone registers the vibrations of its own body: the inarticulate sound of itself as is only audible in and through itself.

A similar sequence is found at the film's end, where the camera is once more unmanned and on the floor, staring this time by happenstance at Ángela as she is dragged into the darkness by the film's arche-monster. Cameron has noted that this scene is devoid of standard cinematic sensibilities such as the 'identification of a frame, the separation of a figure and ground' (78). In Cameron's opinion, this sequence portrays a 'vision of media as chaotic and disarticulated from human subjectivity', 'a media ontology devoid of sense and intentionality' (79).

Cameron is entirely correct to suggest this. When left alone, the camera is unresponsive. It is unable of intending itself towards the world it describes, as visualised in its unfocused, poorly framed footage. If film is, as Sobchack argues, the 'expression ... of ... perception' (*Address* 19), then I contend that this footage is almost non-cinematic, in the sense that its capacity to perceive the world it records is demonstrably limited and that its resultant expression is largely insensible.⁵

Nevertheless, I argue that in the scope of *[REC]*'s whole, these sequences of disarticulated vision are in-fact sensible *for* their insensibility. They demonstrate that the film's perspective

⁵ Sobchack writes 'that any film – however abstract or 'structural-materialist' – presupposes that it will be understood *as* signification, as conveying meaning beyond the brute material presence of light and shadow on a plane surface' (*Address* 6). Thus, it would be wrong to claim that the sequences analysed are non-cinematic in the strictest of senses because they are nevertheless understood as signification, even if that signification is largely insensible, as I will go on to reason. Cinema cannot, by its nature, be non-cinematic. Rather then, I mean to state that these sequences visualise what non-cinematic film might, paradoxically, look like, by *representing* footage that supposes itself to be stripped of intention and thus rendered insensible within a cinematic product, *[REC]*, which is itself intelligible.

is other than its filmmaker's by that it can continue to exist by the efforts of its camera alone. However, they equally show that, *sans* cameraman, the film's perspective loses the intentionality ordinarily characteristic of film, the majority of *[REC]* included. Working alone, the camera produces a vision that is to cinema as *Lorem Ipsum* is to text, visible but insensible and aseptic. Thus, these sequences describe the film's viewing-view as neither the camera's nor Pablo's, but the meaningful product of their union,⁶ and, in this, *[REC]*'s *de facto* model of film is again similar to Sobchack's.

The film's viewed-view, in Sobchack's opinion, is the result of its 'film-maker's/camera's embodiment relation' (*Address* 192): a relationship in which the cameraman's existing senses are augmented as he or she looks *through* the camera, that mediating technology a part of their 'experience of bodily engaging the world' (Sobchack 181). This is similarly the case for Pablo, who experiences his world *through* the camera, that experience explicitly augmented by the functional application of the camera's night-vision mode and onboard light source.

To the point, however, if film is the epiphenomenon of Pablo's interaction with the camera, then Pablo's relationship to the film is gametic, and like all gametes Pablo is consumed in the process. If Pablo's perspective could ever be confused with the film's it is because he is only ever intelligible as 'there' so much as his presence is felt behind the camera. Pablo is only very briefly visible as a disarticulate blur of limbs: a foot or an arm. His own body is forfeit to the embodiment relation he has with the film's camera. Thus, *[REC]* describes a 'zombie-media': a media which is not only, as I have shown, an undead-type simulacrum of the world it claims to describe, but the first-person perspective of which figures a film-subject that cannibalises its maker, that duplicitously signifies as Pablo because its limited imitation of life is abstracted from his.

Similar notions of zombie-media are found in *[REC]*'s contemporaries, two prominent examples of which are Romero's 2008 *Diary of the Dead* and Sánchez and Hale's short, 'A Ride in the Park', of Wingard *et al.*'s 2013 anthology film, *V/H/S/2*, both of which follow *[REC]* in their adoption of the found-footage style, and both of which detail media that make zombies of their fictional makers. In 'A Ride in the Park', a cyclist wearing a helmet mounted camera is attacked and turned into a zombie, the remainder of the film following its filmmaker-*cum*-zombie as a zombie-*cum*-filmmaker, unwittingly recording its search for human flesh in a dramatic realization of the undead-type relationship between media and its maker. Whilst *Diary of the Dead*, which is closer in style to *[REC]*, follows a group of

⁶ This notion is visualized in the aforementioned sequence in which the camera lies on the floor recording out-of-focus visuals, in which the first thing to re-enter the camera's plane of focus is the cameraman's foot.

media students who document the zombie-outbreak as it unfolds so as they might upload their experience to online video-sharing websites. Here the film's undeadly relationship with its maker is most clearly demonstrated in a sequence not dissimilar to that of *[REC]*'s 'rewind sequence' previously analysed, in which *Diary of the Dead*'s chief fictional filmmaker is first shot dead on camera, and then 'revives' in the following scene via footage of his former self.

Writing on *Diary of the Dead*, Keetley has read this metaphorical similarity between media and undeath in reverse, arguing that as much as media lives an undead-type life, the undead owe their life to media.⁷ 'The zombies in *Diary*', she argues, 'are always framed by at least one camera, often multiple cameras. They are *bred* by the cameras, which are, everywhere in the world of *Diary* and in our own world, the indubitable source of the zombie plague. The dead come back to life over and over on camera and only on camera' (n.pag). Extrapolating, she reads the zombie as 'the perfect metaphor for the viral products of our mundane technologies' (n.pag), arguing that media in Romero's film is like the zombie in that it threatens to 'infect us with ... [its] lack of humanity, creating a post-apocalyptic world in which the human, to the extent that there is a human, has become unrecognizable' (n.pag). Romero's zombies, Keetley suggests, 'mobilize the outcomes of our own reckless embrace of technology' (n.pag), visualizing the media-user as, like the zombie, living a life only half there.

Romero's work is a clear satirical jab at media dependence in the modern world, a blow particularly targeted at the social media to which *Diary of the Dead*'s metafictional film was fictionally due for upload. Its filmmaking characters put their own and other's lives in jeopardy for the sake of 'getting the shot', and, as Keetley rightly comments, their 'choice to film rather than participate' in many of the film's struggles 'represents a chilling lack of humanity' (n.pag); a dangerous technophilia that culminates in the film's chief filmmaker, bleeding out on the floor, asking his friend to 'shoot' him. Holding out a camera, his deathbed wish is to be shot – recorded – being shot. The camera becomes weaponised and media dependence is visualized as a form of technologically mediated suicide. A life lived through media culminates in the filmmaker's death. Better, 'reviving' in the following scene

⁷ Similarly, Cameron has suggested that the zombies of Romero's earlier *Day of the Dead* might be read as themselves a type of medium. Drawing attention to its scientists' attempts to 'reprogram' humanity into a captive zombie, Bub, Cameron argues that the 'zombie is not simply remade through media but also functions itself like a type of medium' (70), a blank slate onto which data – here data on how to be a human – is recorded.

by the powers of the same mediating technology, a life lived through media culminates in his *un*-death – creating a non-human simulacrum of his life.

Through its portrayal of zombie-media, *Diary of the Dead* critiques the media-zombie. It visualises the media-addict as transformed into a simulacrum of their former selves by the media that dominate their worlds, and similar readings are applicable across all of the found-footage films discussed here. Like *Diary of the Dead*, ‘A Ride in the Park’ is composed of footage designed for upload to social media websites, and both can therefore be read as commentaries on the value of lives lived online that describe online identities as, like the zombie, inauthentic simulacra of the people they appear to describe. *[REC]*’s fictional media product, on the other hand, is not ‘produced’ for the same social media, but it nevertheless reads as a similar commentary on the negative influence of media on its users’ identities. Its media, which begins life as a reality show, is inspired by the Spanish broadcasting tradition of *tebasura*: ‘trash television’ composed of tabloid and reality programming (Rowan-Legg 214), and as this media product invades the domestic sphere in the shape of its television crew, zombies rise around it. The film’s first zombie transforms only after they have entered her house. She transforms on film and then, in the aforementioned ‘rewind sequence’, repeats this transformation by the power of the same mediating technologies because she, and zombies like her, are metaphoric visualisations of the media-zombie.⁸

Yet, it would be reductive to read these texts as so monochromatically doubtful of modern media and its mediating technologies as these readings suggest. For example, the climactic sequence in which *Diary of the Dead*’s chief filmmaker is doubly ‘shot’ on camera and then rises once more undeniably visualizes the undead-type relationship between media and its addicts. The filmmaker’s dedication to a life lived on film results in his undead-type rebirth. However, this same double act of shooting also ensures that the filmmaker’s resident zombie *in potentia* never comes to life. Whether or not the filmmaker is doubly ‘shot’, he is doomed to become a zombie of one kind or the other. If he ‘shoots’ himself, he will become a media-zombie. If he does not he will become a zombie-proper. Romero’s film is not therefore as homogenously disparaging of modern media technologies as might be initially assumed.

So its opening narration maintains, the film tells the ‘truth’ of the situation. It is a no-holds-barred representation of a world in which being ‘shot’ has become a necessity. Where its

⁸ A similar attack on the negative influence of reality programming is forwarded in Brooker’s 2008 mini-series, *Dead Set*, which imagines a group of ‘Big Brother’ contestants who momentarily survive a zombie-apocalypse ensconced in the Big Brother house. The series is not filmed in a found-footage style, but released contemporary with the texts detailed here, it is useful comparator in terms of the shared sentiment of its time.

institutionalized mass-media equivalents have sugar-coated their reports of the escalating undead situation, the film's guerrilla social-media describes the reality of a world in which a bullet to the head has become a very real necessity for anyone wishing to maintain a thoroughbred human afterlife. However, by Romero's painfully overstated equation of a gun and a camera that both shoot, it also describes a world in which *media engagement* has become a precondition for meaningful human existence. The film's climactic double-act of shooting capitalizes its filmmaker's effacing relationship with media and completes his transformation into a media-zombie, but without it he would become a zombie all the same, his media-independence leaving him unable, like the zombie-proper, to engage his world and others in it. Thus, Romero's work might doubt the value of modern media and its related technologies, but it begrudgingly recognizes their need in the modern world.

V/H/S/2 hangs on a similar equivocation. Although its visualization of zombie-made-media is one of the more invective images of the films analyzed here, figuring a media that has made a literal zombie of its user, that same user is also momentarily restored to his former self by the sight and sound of his smartphone on which he has accidentally dialed his partner. A smartphone might not be the same as a video-camera (although the distinction is somewhat blurred in the film's modern setting) but it is nonetheless symbolic of the same social media as signified by the specific consumer technology on which the film is 'recorded'.⁹ Whereas one is associable with the production of the zombie, the other restores the human; however, I conjecture that their different functions are not a consequence of their different forms. Rather, *V/H/S/2's* vacillation on the capacities of its mediating technologies and their related media hangs on how they are used.

The smartphone is in front the filmmaker. It is the object of his conscious intention and, as it is thus used *by* him, it momentarily restores his human consciousness. In contrast, if the filmmaker's camera describes its literally zombified user where it might figuratively do so otherwise, it is because this specific mediating technology is attached to his head. The camera is not, as in *[REC]*, an augmentative instrument that is taken into the filmmaker's embodied experience of the world, but a parasitic appendage. Out of the filmmaker's sight, it is not used *by* him. It does not extend his senses, and it is not taken into his experience of the world. It is beyond him, existing in a unilaterally beneficial relationship. In a sense, this mediating technology has 'gone over his head'; thus, *V/H/S/2* is less skeptical of its spotlighted media than it is the manner in which it is used, shifting culpability from a media

⁹ The film is 'recorded' on a 'GoPro', a portable 'action camera' that is popularly used in the creation of videos for upload to social media.

that makes zombies of its users to the users whose reckless embrace of technology lets them be used by it.

Returning to *[REC]*, one might also read the film's focus on its own production as a disparaging commentary on media over-reliance. Its filmmaking characters are media addicts who insist on recording the unfolding events in spite of that, in the given circumstances, doing so is counterintuitive to survival. *[REC]* describes media users who value 'getting' the zombie on film over 'getting them in the head', and this reckless dedication to media and its related technologies is prefigured as generative of the zombie via the figuration of film's zombie-like existence. Yet, the film is not so unremittingly pessimistic towards the technologies of its own production and time. It may establish a similarity between the zombie and its media; however, this extends to form, not style. *[REC]*'s media is *like* the zombie in that it produces a new life abstracted from its maker, a life that, like the zombie, falsely signifies as that gametous to its existence. However, unlike the zombie, this media is not the product of a non-consensual process premised on the capacity of a parasitic agency to produce new life through the corruption of a body and its signified person. The film's zombie-like media is, rather, the result of the obverse. It is the result of a constructive process, a product into which Pablo has voluntarily and purposefully infused a vestigial memory of himself via his augmenting relationship with the film's camera.

Shaviro writes that in Romero's original *Living Dead* series, '[p]erception itself becomes infected, and is transformed into a kind of magical, contagious contact'(96). The motif of infection is somewhat misplaced in an analysis of Romero's original trilogy, his ghoul's void of the infectious qualities characteristic of their successors. However, the parity he espies between the zombie and the filmic medium that contains them stands nonetheless. So Shaviro states, '[the zombie's] residual, yet all-too-substantial, half-lives reproduce the conditions both of film actors separated from their charismatic presence (which the camera has appropriated) and of film audiences compulsively, vicariously participating in events that they are unable to control or possess'(85).

One could argue that film is *always* zombie-like, the processes of its (re)production similar to those of the undead-zombie. However the connection is made explicit in the found-footage zombie-film, the trademark style of which showcases a fictional variant of the film's undead-type (re)production within itself. In this regard, the found-footage zombie-film is similar to Stoker's *Dracula*, the metafictional form of which, or so I have argued in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, similarly metaphorizes the contagion it contains. However, these films not only posit their media as the products of an undead-type

(re)production, but as zombie-like subjects that roam their worlds and cannibalize their makers. Beyond representing their media's own zombie-like identity, this representation of zombie-media is also implicated in a critique of the media-zombie, a critique on media overdependence in the modern day. On that note, however, it is by no means the only concern of these fictions to berate the media that sustain them. Although this zombie-media might produce media-zombies, these films recognise that as much as this transformative relationship between media and their users might be engaged in the production of vacuous simulacra, it can also be engaged as an augmentative process, a relationship premised on voluntary sensory extension and as an expansion of who or what one is per the necessities of modern life.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Fictions of the undead are by no means strangers to critical attention. A great deal of this attention, however, has been focused on the ways these ‘anxious’ texts correspond with the anxieties of the contexts in which they are produced. A typical understanding is that ‘Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known’ (Halberstam 2). The Gothic monster, in this case, becomes an allegorical representation of the unwanted shapes into which the human might become.

It is not difficult to understand why the undead have attracted this sort of criticism. They have been historically expressed in the vampire and the zombie. Both are quasi-human forms defined by distinct visual markers of deformity, and the flesh of each are more than sufficient canvases on which to paint that which a given society feared. However, the undead are not, by definition, the vampire or the zombie.

This is perhaps a contended point. Standard critical usage has seen the term ‘undead’ used interchangeably with those of the vampire, the zombie or their combination. However, this tendency is untheorized. It is not based on any conscious conceptualisation of what the undead are and what their relationship to the vampire and the zombie might be, but rather a tacit assumption. As an assumption, it is logical to make and ordinarily innocuous. Most vampires and zombies *are* undead, at least in the twentieth century contexts through which critics have lived and experienced their kind. However, this definition is insufficient to describe the undead as an ontological and media tradition of their own, most evidently because not all vampire and zombies are actively or meaningfully undead.

The distinction is largely historical, but it is increasingly relevant in modern television and cinema, in which the vampire is often configured as a being that is not strictly undead, a departure that returns the vampire to its pre-*Dracula* roots. The vampire has a well-documented history preceding Stoker’s redefining addition of undeath. However, beyond that it fed on blood, its existential state was mostly uncertain. Polidori’s 1819 novel, *The Vampyre*, imagined the vampire as an immortal being that resurrected by moonlight, but

always as itself, while Féval experimented with what the vampire was in each of his novels. In *Vampire City* (1875), it was a 'collective' (*Vampire City* 50) lifeform composed of its victims; while in *Knightshade* (1860) it was a hoax designed to hide entirely human thieves. Modern texts have not seen a return to this diversity, but they are increasingly engaged in the representation of vampires that are not undead: beings who survive their death, their person relatively unchanged; or, as in the case of films like *Afflicted* (2013), do not die at all.

A full reprise of the convoluted relationships between the undead, the vampire and the zombie will be necessary before the undead can be comprehensively understood as a phenomenon of their own, a topic which has yet to receive any explicit critical attention, but which is increasingly important as the rift between these three terms continues to grow. In lieu of a comprehensive genealogy of undeath however, I have conceptualised of the undead as an ontological and media phenomenon that emancipated itself from its vampiric origins in Post-War American and global contexts and which is, naturally, defined by notions of undeath.

Born in death, the undead's existence questions the value of our own. Accordingly, I have proposed that their texts are not locked down to the anxious social, political and historical contexts in terms of which they might be more obviously read. Instead, I have suggested that fictions of the undead reflect on questions of who, what and why we 'are'. In this dissertation, I have focused on the ways in which this philosophical impetus is paired with the media forms to which these texts pay insistent attention, arguing that they observe the ways in which identities are created, informed, distorted or otherwise altered by media technologies.

In my first case study I analysed Matheson's 1954 quasi-vampire novel, *I am Legend*. Matheson's text is the evolutionary stopgap between the undead vampire and the undead zombie. Although it is not therefore significant to the traditions of either, it *is* to the undead, the beginnings of their emancipation. Imagining an America destroyed from within by a mutational bacterial contagion, Matheson's post-apocalyptic vision has well noted ties with the political turbulence of its Cold War context. It reads as a sardonic jab at anti-communist hysteria. However, the novel is not limited to this contextual significance, which is only one of its potential, albeit highly visible, readings related to the social construction of identities: capitalist, communist or otherwise. Identities in *I am Legend* are the product of palimpsestic change. They are that into which a subject becomes as they form themselves around media-images, a process undergone by virtue of the duress implicit in those images. Even the novel's vampires are 'media-made'; media technologies a surrogate for the undead's contagioned lifeblood.

In context, media technologies were harnessed by political forces to produce an image of the communist-as-vampire in the cultural imagination, which *I am Legend* reflects in its portrayal of media technologies which are responsible for the very monsters they claimed to fear. In reality, as in fiction, these technologies exerted an undeathly power over the American public, altering the perception of communism and its suspected followers and emboldening America's own capitalist identity. Thus, Matheson's novel allegorizes the undeathly influence of media in terms of the social and political turbulence which it served to inspire. However, Matheson's novel might also be said to speak more generally on the media technologies which were themselves in the process of transforming. In particular, television underwent an unprecedented metamorphosis in Post-War America – by 1960, less than thirteen percent of American households would be without a television set (Marc and Thompson 54). Its growth was viral, and its popularisation altered the ways in which the American public experienced their world and their place within it, a media-centricity which Matheson's novel reflects in its protagonist whose life is orientated by the media texts with which he surrounds himself.

A focus on the transformational power of television specifically would be taken up in *I am Legend's* spiritual successor, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, which took Matheson's quasi-vampires and made them into what is retroactively known as the undead zombie. As with Matheson's, Romero's work can be read in terms of the social, economic and political issues reaching critical mass at and around the time of its release. Likewise however, it is not limited to these readings. In exploring the potential shapes into which the human might become, the film invariably calls into question what it is to continue being human, a question which the film's siege scenario resolves through metaphors of place: the meaningful human defined against the eternally wandering, essentially placeless, zombie.

It goes without mention that Romero's movies are important to the undead, but little attention has been paid to the significance that he allocates place, his most enduring and original contribution to the genre. The value of place is a topic repeatedly returned to in fictions of the undead, which continuously reconfigure the sieges of Romero's films into new mediums, scenarios and national contexts. For example, Charlie Brooker's British mini-series, *Dead Set*, follows Big Brother contestants sheltered in the Big Brother house, while Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* imagines familiar London landmarks stripped of human inhabitants and therefore rendered meaningless. Indeed, this attention to place is felt as far afield as the recently popular sandbox survival videogame, examples of which include *Minecraft* and *7 Days to Die*. Each allow their players to produce their own defensible structures against their zombie antagonists, making the game-world meaningful to the player

and giving meaning to their presence within that world. In *Night of the Living Dead*, this reflexive attribution of meaning between persons and place is manipulated by the presence of a television set, which alters its users' perception of the world, their place within it and their relation to others similarly placed, which again corresponds with developments in contemporary media technologies.

For my final case study, I turned to the recent proliferation of found-footage zombie movies, focusing on a non-exhaustive sample of its most sophisticated incarnations: *[REC]*, *Diary of the Dead* and *V/H/S/2*. Although the found-footage movie has origins dating as far back as 1971 in Peter Watkin's *Punishment Park*, or more popularly in Ruggero Deodato's gory *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), it is only in the past decade that this cinematic style has flourished, and its recent success is doubtlessly connected to the real-life spread of home videos as facilitated by developing media cultures of the internet and the popularity of video-sharing websites within them. Found-footage zombie movies reflect on the impact of the changing media technologies of which they themselves are a consequence. They figure film as its own zombie-like subject that feeds on the energies of its filmmaker, and in turn they comment on the media-zombie, persons whose lives are metaphorically consumed by their unremitting dedication to the global media technologies which have become an ever-present influence in daily life.

In representing media technologies within themselves, one consumed within the other, fictions of the undead draw out these technologies' undeathly metaphysics and link it to both our own carnivorous media consumption and media which in turn consume us. In all of the texts analysed, media technologies exert an undeathly hold over their users. They infect their worlds, and in doing so alter who they are, how they identify.

Writing with reference to the undead zombie movie, Cameron draws similar comparisons between media technologies and the undead. As I have explained in my previous chapter, Cameron argues that 'the zombie body and the "body" of the medium are metaphorically connected in a reversible relationship' (67). Media, he argues, 'are overlaid with bodily metaphors and are viewed as vulnerable like human bodies to aging, disease, and dismemberment' (88).

Speaking on the distinction between Romero's slow zombies and their fast, infected successors, he also reverses this metaphor to suggest that:

The [zombie] body is figured as a medium, to which norms of playback and resolution apply. ... If Romero's shambling figures replicate the slow and steady

unspooling of low-resolution analog media, then the contemporary zombie reflects digital media's capacity for speed and random access. (73)

A key text for Cameron in establishing this comparison is Romero's *Day of the Dead*. In the film, a captive zombie, Bub, 'is the subject of experiments by Dr. Logan (Richard Liberty), who is attempting to 'cure' the zombie affliction through a type of reprogramming' (69). 'Here', Cameron argues, 'the zombie is not simply remade through media but also functions itself like a type of medium' (70) onto which humanity might be recorded.

Extrapolating Cameron's argument, if the undead zombie is a blank medium, then the human is surely a kind of media text. The undead rewrite the significance of the human body as they replace its respective person with a being in their own image, and this motif of palimpsest figures human identity as a media text which might be rewritten or else erased and replaced: the body a blank slate onto which a person is authored and re-authored. Thus, fictions of the undead produce reversible metaphors linking media, undeath and identity: reflecting on the ways in which we are made and remade by the media technologies that surround us.

Cameron's analysis raises a few interesting points on the limitations of this study, and I will briefly consider these here. A defining argument in this dissertation has been that the undead's value is not limited to an allegory of its anxious contexts, but Cameron's comparison of undead monsters that evolve with the media technologies that contain them foregrounds that they do not escape their contexts entirely.

I have argued that it is only in Post-War contexts that the undead become a Gothic monster and media tradition of their own, and given the parallels between media and undeath, this is unsurprising. If the undead proliferate in Post-War contexts, it is because they allegorize the advance of global media technologies that 'infected' the world and altered the significance of daily life. I have touched only briefly on the significance that the media technologies highlighted in each of my case studies had in context. In doing so I have sought to avoid a return to the anxiety model paradigms from which my study attempts to distance itself. However, it would benefit the lines of enquiry I have opened in this dissertation to be read into a more nuanced understanding of the changing technological contexts in which the texts analysed were produced.

This brings me to my second point, which is that the connection between media and the undead need not be limited, as it has been here, to its *representation* within their fictions. The undeadly remediative logic that these fictions describe is in turn described by their

tradition's own textual development. Fictions of the undead have proliferated precisely because of their undeathly propensity to infect and populate new media technologies and narrative modes. This characteristic propagation has been present since undeath's beginnings. Stoker's *Dracula* was almost immediately remediated to the stage in Deane and Balderston's play, and from the stage to film in Tod Browning's movie (Stuart 221), and this characteristic growth continues to date.

On a related note, a similarly infectious pattern of development can be seen in the undead's ability to 'infect' different nations and cultures. In this dissertation, I conceptualised the undead as a type of Gothic monster and media tradition that was emancipated by its remediation from British vampire fiction to American and global contexts. Accordingly, I continued my study by analysing largely American productions. Most popular and influential fictions of the undead *are* produced in American contexts, but to say that they are therefore an American phenomenon would be reductive. However much these texts might be *produced* in American contexts, they are nevertheless international products in that they have maintained international significance and success.

Again, this point is noticeable from their beginnings, as evidenced by that Tod Browning's American remake of *Dracula* was produced side-by-side with Melford's Spanish language equivalent, and this propensity of the undead to translate to international contexts survived to the Post-War canon analysed here. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, for instance, 'drew huge crowds in France, Spain and Italy' (Hervey 17), the popular myth being that the film 'was basically discovered by the French' (Romero qtd. in Hervey 18).

Of course, fictions of the undead do have culturally specific iterations, a paradigmatic example of which is the gory Italian zombie movie as championed by Lucio Fulci's infamous *Zombi 2*. Thus titled, however, his film is construed as a spiritual successor to Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, which was alternately titled 'Zombi' for its European releases. 'Italy's first zombie film thus owes its existence to the Italian release of an American zombie film' (O'Brien 57). These culturally specific instances of the undead at once demonstrate the undead's undeathly capacity to infect and mutate 'national' cinema, but at the same time they show the international appeal and success of the American produced mainline from which these nationally instanced variations take their cue.¹

¹ This relationship between American, international products and their national offshoots raises a host of questions beyond the remit of the study. What is the value of these culturally-specific subgenres in relation to the American texts from which they take leave, and what might this dynamic infer to the multi-national or international values of the American canon analysed here?

If the undead maintain a trans-national popularity it is perhaps because, although they might be read in terms of isolated national issues, they also consider the ways in which our identities are affected by the media technologies that were and are developing in global contexts. *Night of the Living Dead*, for example, touches upon issues emerging in continental philosophy, and it does so because it foregrounds a developing media technology, television, which was influencing the experience and significance of daily life on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thus, by representing the undeathly metaphysics of global media technologies within themselves, fictions of the undead pave the way for the international appeal of their own media texts, which might in turn be read into metaphors of their media form's undeathly propagation: their characteristic infection of other nations and cultures. If this study has been concerned with the textual *representation* of media texts, then this recursive logic expands its enquiry to their real life equivalents. How might metaphors of media's undeathly hold over human identity be read in reverse? To what extent do fictions of the undead's *own* undeathly metaphysics call to account their *own* difficult identity – one in and out of national contexts?

The recent proliferation of the found-footage zombie movie marks a movement away from this model of an American cinematic tradition that infects other cultures. *[REC]*, for example, is not a Spanish take on an American tradition, but part of an international development. It might possess value distinct to its own national context, as its American equivalents to theirs, but these international texts nevertheless share many themes in common, which is unsurprising given their focus on post-national cultures of the internet and online media. *[REC]*, one will note, is somewhat of an exception to this. Its fictional media text is not explicitly designated for upload to online video-sharing websites as those of its contemporaries. However, this focus is clarified in its sequel, *[REC]2*, which is shot by two *de facto* film crews: one a group of teenagers hoping to make a viral video, and the other a Special Forces team equipped with helmet mounted cameras whose footage is an undeniably imitation of those found in first-person-shooter videogames.

On that note, it is perhaps in the online media of the video-game that the undead's future lies. Nowhere else have they so successfully saturated modern culture than in this digital landscape, a burgeoning media phenomenon led by the *Left 4 Dead*, *Dead Island* and *Dead*

Rising series.² In many ways, these texts continue the traditions I have described. Remediating the undead zombie movie to a new interactive medium, they imitate a distinctly cinematic style; tell their stories through metafictional texts found within them; and are ordinarily prefaced, punctuated, accompanied or advertised by other traditional media texts, predominantly film. These multimedia products invite their users within their diegesis and in doing so they continue to explore the relationships between media and identity. Unlike their traditional counterparts however, videogames are not ordinarily associable with any one cultural context. In an age of digital content distribution, notions of import and export and translation and adaptation are widely defunct. The modern videogame is a multilingual product simultaneously released in multinational contexts. In the case of online multiplayer game modes popular in undead zombie videogames, that same media is then often simultaneously experienced by persons from different geographic locations and cultural backgrounds.

I have shown that fictions of the undead explore the relationships between media and identity, but as they continue to grow through new, post-national media technologies – a movement that begins where this dissertation leaves off – their future remains to be seen. How will the questions identified in this dissertation be asked, let alone answered, as the undead seek shelter in new media technologies? How will these thematics be influenced as the production and consumption of media becomes international, non-linear and fragmented in cultures of the internet? Moreover, how will they survive a world in which post-humanist thought has fully developed? Notions of undeath suggest a way of thinking beyond the human, but so long as the undead are ‘undead’ – their life defined relative to ours – their continued existence evidences the human’s incapacity to fully move beyond anthropocentric conceptions of the self. Can the undead survive in a world in which the defining geographies are post-human, or will their survival mark our incapacity to fully conceptualise life beyond our human selves? Is the vampire’s gradual cessation from undeath evidence of the posthumanist project’s premature end? I have argued that fictions of the undead are defined by the questions that their palimpsestic existence asks, and there are many more questions yet to be answered.

² These are examples of popular zombie videogames, meaning videogames centred entirely on the undead zombie. However, the zombie videogame subgenre is not the only one in which the undead appear. They routinely feature as antagonists (sometimes protagonists) in a diverse range of videogames not dedicated to them and their kind.

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