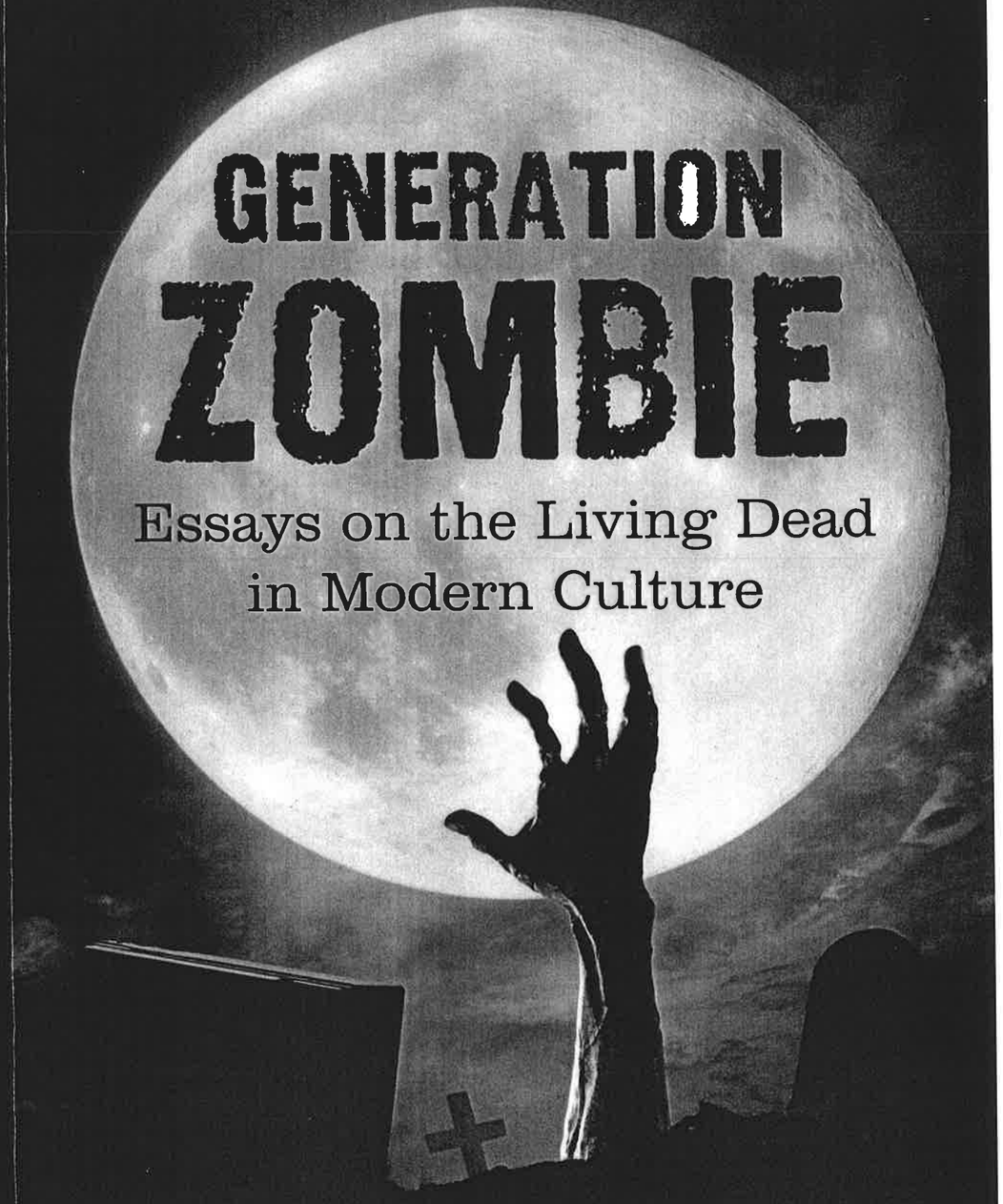
GENERATION ZOMBIE

Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture



Edited by **STEPHANIE BOLUK** *and* **WYLIE LENZ**

experimental treatment; in *Severed*, Rita's tree spike is actually the immediate cause that introduces the hormone into the human population. Perhaps, then, we are meant to read the radicals as playing the role of human facilitator to Nature's planned revenge.

29. Although one character, Ramon, a severely traumatized logger from a renegade encampment in the woods, proselytizes that this plague is God's vengeance, the viewer is not lead to agree with him. Ramon is shot by another logger in the middle of his sermon, and as he falls from his perch high up in a tree, his body briefly contorts, mid-air, into the shape of a cross. Despite the theatrics, the audience is not lead to think of Ramon's opinion as a revelation; rather, throughout his screen-time he is represented as pitiable, a mad-man, but not particularly profound or wise. True to the contemporary zombie genre, there are no other clues that the phenomenon has any supernatural properties; the idea that the lone scientist ought not attempt to flout God's will by raising the dead has been replaced by the secular notion that when one tampers with the natural order, things can easily "go to hell."

30. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 294.

31. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 14.

32. This turn of the eco-zombie narrative, whereby eco-phobia becomes a critique of modern industrial capitalism and its abuses of the environment, is revelatory of parallel trends in other types of "eco" narratives, such as disaster films like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004). The 2010 Cultural Studies Association conference (held at UC Berkeley, March 18–20) devoted a panel to "Capitalism and the (Post)Apocalypse in Film and Fiction." Papers by Erin Paszko, "An Awry Approach to Terrorism through Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow*," and Laura Hudson, "Natural Terror: The Eco_disaster Film after 9/11," addressed the genre of the eco-disaster narrative.

33. This is the caption at the end of the controversial WWF Brazil 9/11 ad, which replays the crashing of airliners into the twin towers—after the first two, about several dozen follow suit—in order to make a point about how much more catastrophic the tsunami of the following year was in terms of loss of human life. In her conference paper previously mentioned, Erin Paszko argued that Nature is cast as a terrorist in this advertisement. My interest centers on the ad's juxtaposition of the word "Brutal," and its association with animalism, with a visual representation that crosses references to Nature, to the terrorist, and to God: as if an angry Zeus were hurling airplanes, like thunderbolts, at lower Manhattan. For a discussion of this ad and the fallout, see adfreak.com article "DDB, WWF reeling from fallout over 9/11 ad," accessed September 1, 2009.

34. Tom Hillard, "Deep Into That Darkness Peering: An essay on Gothic Nature," *Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and the Environment (ISLE)* 16, no. 4 (2009): 685–695.

35. In "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia," Simon Estok argues that ecophobia should not be dismissed by ecocriticsm, but it is clear that he is locating it as the opposition: "An ecocriticism that takes ecophobia as its core (as feminism takes misogyny and sexism as core issues) will undoubtedly find itself moving toward methodology, will find itself in positions of confluent theorizing, will find itself productively continuing the discussion of environmental issues..." (*ISLE* 16, no. 2 [2009]: 203–225). I would submit that this position (whereby ecophobia is likened to misogyny and sexism) gives it too little credit. Ecophobia should not merely be designated as the camp that fears nature and therefore undermines an environmentalist agenda; it can also espouse a sublime respect for the planet which advocates for the protection of the natural world's complex ecosystems and the maintenance of their equilibrium.

36. In my use of the term "preternatural," I am drawing on the language of Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park's *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York: Zone Books, 1998) and their description of the preternatural as "the workings of Nature where she seems to be peculiar in her manner" (231). The category of the "preternatural" as explained by Daston and Park concerns natural phenomena that were interpreted as marvelous—which could not yet be explained by scientific knowledge—but which were not thought of as miraculous or as supernatural. It thus signifies the recognition of the limits of human knowledge.

37. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 3.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 5.

40. Ibid., 6.

41. For example, "the scientific object is petrified, whereas the rigid ritual of former times appears supple in its substitution of one thing for another" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 7).

42. Ibid., 22.

Lost Bodies/Lost Souls: *Night of the Living Dead* and *Deathdream* as Vietnam Narrative[1]

KAREN RANDELL

"The dead of night changed the lives of many ... and ended the lives of some."

This tagline for the 1974 Canadian zombie film *Deathdream* (dir. Bob Clark) could summarize the experiences of many fighting soldiers during the Vietnam War. It doesn't, however: it summarizes the zombie madness brought to a small town by the returning (undead) Vietnam veteran, Andy (Richard Backus), summoned back home by his mother's anguished pleas. Made in 1972, while the war still raged and the anti-war movement gained momentum, this low-budget zombie horror film engages with many issues pertinent to the war era: PTSD, or Vietnam Syndrome,[2] the deaths of over 58,000 American soldiers and the subsequent national mourning, the loss of 2,300 men declared Missing in Action (MIA) or Prisoners of War (POW), and the anxiety that this absence precipitated. The film's tagline thus exploits the tropes of the horror genre but echoes the real anxieties present in an American society disenchanted with the Vietnam War. This chapter will focus on two zombie films made during the Vietnam era—*Night of the Living Dead* (dir. George Romero, 1968) and *Deathdream*—and discuss the ways in which the fantastic specter of the zombie articulates issues of loss and mourning for the American war dead and missing in a way that was not being addressed by the war films of the period.[3]

With the two exceptions of *Lost Command* (dir. Mark Robson, 1966) and *The Green Berets* (dir. Ray Kellogg and John Wayne, 1968), there was no war film set in Vietnam while the war was ongoing. Notions of heroism and the structure of the classical American war genre as buddy movie, so popular during and after World War II,[4] did not translate during the Vietnam War as it was not well-supported by either the public or politicians. It is not surprising that Hollywood, always reliant on a viable economic outcome, did not put into production any other war films. The release of *The Deer Hunter* (dir. Michael Chimino) in 1978 and *Apocalypse Now* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola) a year later mark the beginning of the direct engagement with the experiences of war in a Vietnamese setting. Even then, I would argue, we are often in a metaphorical combat zone. It is not until *Platoon* in 1986,

when Oliver Stone makes what becomes the quintessentially iconic Vietnam War combat film, that the traumas of the battlefield are explicitly depicted. As with the First World War, it seems that a period of time was required after Vietnam before these experiences could be "safely" negotiated in the home space of American mainstream cinema.[5] The further away from the war the films are, in terms of temporality, the closer they approach the physical space of the war zone. In this case, the necessity of a temporal gap between the event and a culture's ability to represent this trauma indicated the degree to which the anxieties collectively experienced as a result of the Vietnam War were not sufficiently assimilated until the 1980s.

Where, then, do we see the anxieties of war played out during the conflict itself? Most certainly every night on American TV news reports and in violent returning veteran films such as *Born Losers* (dir. Tom Lauglin, 1967) and *Angels from Hell* (dir. Bruce Kessler, 1968) and in the Vietnam western, such as *Little Big Man* (dir. Arthur Penn, 1970) or *Soldier Blue* (dir. Ralph Nelson, 1970). It also very convincingly finds itself displaced into the horror films of the era. In the following analysis of *Night of the Living Dead* and *Deathdream* I draw on debates in trauma theory to argue how the Vietnam War manifests within these films.[6] The visceral excess displayed within the return of the undead presents, to use Thomas Elsaesser's phrase, a "referred referentiality" within the films of the missing and dead American soldier,[7] a referentiality that signifies the original traumatic event of the Vietnam War. Although the war itself is conspicuously absent, the film obliquely evokes the severe maiming and unclaimed deaths of the soldiers. *Night of the Living Dead* becomes, then, a point of reference for the continuing non-presence in American society of the bodies, living or dead, of the MIA and POW soldiers in Vietnam. Similarly, *Deathdream* becomes an horrific wish-fulfillment narrative in which the trauma of those bereft by the death of the Vietnam soldier, in this case the mother, creates a neurotic return of her dead son that can only be resolved once she can accept his death and display the appropriate societal graveside mourning. These films displace the bodies of the lost and dead into fantasy (horror) narratives that enable the anxieties around this visible absence within the American home front to be visited within the safe space of the film's generic boundaries.

George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* has been read alternatively as a critique of capitalism[8] and as an apocalyptic narrative concerning Cold War anxieties around nuclear contamination[9]; Richard Dyer reads the film in terms of race[10]; Gregory Waller suggests that *Night of the Living Dead* offers "a thorough-going critique of American institutions and values"[11]; Sumiko Higashi writes that the film is "part of the cultural production registering both repression and resistance during the sixties."[12] While I do not disagree with these readings I would like to offer a parallel reading that suggests that there is a traumatic "trace" within the text: a "recovered referentiality" concerning dead and missing American soldiers (MIA) who fought in Vietnam. *Deathdream*, on the other hand, with the exception of Robin Wood's essay,[13] has received very little critical attention, but, as I will argue in the second half of this chapter, it has much to offer in terms of its engagement with the mourning of the American dead of the Vietnam War.

First, however, we turn to *Night of the Living Dead*. The oxymoron "living dead" not only incorporates anxieties around death, dying and burial, but it also speaks to the absence of men who were either classified as missing in action or prisoners of war. Not only is the MIA soldier absent from living in "the world," a loaded expression used by the majority of serving men in Vietnam to describe the United States, but their liminal status as neither fully alive nor fully dead locates them within the realm of the undead. These particular men are doubly absent: they are not in America and they may or may not be alive in Vietnam either. They persist only in the imagination and memory of their families. Thus, the zombie

acts, as Robin Wood has argued, as the "return of the repressed," the corporalization of the corpse that refuses to make itself visible to the American public in the midst of a heavily mediated conflict.

By 1968, and during the film's production, these men were, however, very much "alive" in the American public consciousness. In 1967, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia was established by wives and mothers of the missing soldiers. This group continually campaigned for information about their men and worked actively with the Department of Defense. The campaign included interviews with newspapers and television and the public posting of lists containing the names and photographs of those missing to keep their plight a political issue that remained in the public consciousness. Newspaper reports such as this one from the *New York Times* in November 1968, "A United Appeal on Vietnam," demonstrate the way in which this issue was considered at the time to be a bipartisan matter in which everyone along right/left political spectrum was in agreement:

> The United States appeal to members of the United Nations to put pressure on North Vietnamese to lift its secrecy on American Prisoners of War represents one aspect of Vietnam policy on which virtually all Americans are united.... Hanoi persists in flouting civilized practice and procedures by continuing to ignore the humanitarian obligations it assumed when it signed the Geneva conventions on war prisoners in 1957.[14]

The high profile that the missing soldiers had in American society at the end of the 1960s, because of such campaign action, is what is relevant to my argument regarding the cultural resonance of Romero's undead. By 1968 the number of POWs had risen to 400 (from two in 1964); 106 of these men were captured in that year. The number of men listed as MIA also rose dramatically during this period so that by 1973 when 591 prisoners of war came home in Operation Homecoming there were still 2,500 American soldiers listed as MIA or POW.[15]

Night of the Living Dead is saturated with anxieties present in American society concerning the absent bodies of men. At the end of Romero's film, the bodies of the undead are piled up and burned and a televised news report features a doctor who states: "The bereaved will have to forgo the dubious consolation that a funeral service can give." In the same way many soldiers' body could not be returned to their families, the film similarly denies the cathartic moment of ritualistic burial. As R. H. W. Dillard points out, in the film "all traditional methods of handling the fact of death fail."[16] There is a tension here between the visceral experience provided the audience of the sight of zombie death and the absence of those mourning the deaths of their living dead. At the conclusion of *Night of the Living Dead*, no rites of burial or memorial are present in the burning of the zombie bodies, whereas the beginning of film privileges the memorial of the dead by opening in a graveyard as two young adults visit the grave of their father. This comparison is key to highlighting the changes that are brought about by the presence of the zombies in the rationalized space of the graveyard; a space normally dedicated to controlling and containing the dead.

At the end of the film the models by which society marks death cannot be formalized. The undead are not ritually buried but burned in an *un*ceremonial pyre. This lack of resolution for the dead body is also apparent for the families of those men MIA or whose bodies literally disappear during combat in Vietnam: burial or cremation, funeral services, graves, and memorials are not possible without sight of a body. The men listed MIA cannot be listed as dead until acknowledgment of the sight of their death or body.[17] *Night of the Living Dead* offers a reading of the presence and absence of dead/undead bodies in America, during a critical moment of political unrest and increased war activity. It presents us with an alternative "returning veteran" film. As Robin Wood argues, "what is repressed

must always strive to return."[18] To engage in such a reading, however, one must ask, of course, what is being repressed? The return of the repressed in *Night of the Living Dead* is literally the returning zombie-veteran, this doubled form of *revenant* tapping into what Freud in "Thoughts on War and Death" regards as the most primitive fears that persist in modern society. Freud argues that primitive fears still exist within our modern society that "the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks to carry him off to share his new life with him."[19] In *Night of the Living Dead,* this fear is displayed explicitly in the image of the undead that come back to claim the living, whose only motivation is a desire for nourishment and the inclusion of the living in the confines of their borderline existence. In this way, the traumas of the Vietnam War contaminate the home front existence of those waiting for the return of their soldier to the family, a notion that is continued in the later discussion of *Deathdream* in this chapter.

Night of the Living Dead opens with what is indicated as an annual trip to a cemetery for a brother (Johnny) and sister (Barbra) to their father's grave: it is a ritual of remembrance. From the beginning of the film there is a link made between nation and death. Romero's name appears superimposed upon the image of the American flag. With the country at war in 1968, the image of the national flag flapping against the background of gravestones was extremely controversial. There is a simultaneous subversion here of American patriotic values—by placing his name across the flag the title suggests that Romero is the true patriot and that we should consider the film in some way a critique of its time, something I will return to at the end of this section. The film's opening on what is for Barbra (Judith O'Dea) a sacred act places the notions of sacrifice and mourning central to the film. At their father's grave Barbra admonishes her brother for his, as it happens, prophetic rehearsal of the classic horror movie trope "They're coming to get you, Barbra!" Thunder rolls to herald the appearance of the first of the undead. Typical of the other characters that will appear in abundance soon, this male character is performed with a stiff gait (reminiscent of Boris Karloff's monster in *Frankenstein* [James Whale, 1931]) and echoes Johnny's earlier tease. Barbra is pursued and caught by the zombie, but she struggles free and runs, first to her car and then to a seemingly abandoned farm house. Her brother, however, is caught by the zombie. The camera movement here positions the audience with Barbra as she runs, moving with her, and, at times, canted. The immediacy with which the camera records the action is placed within the aesthetic of the newsreel rather than classical filmmaking: although the narrative is clearly fantasy, the aesthetic hints at realism, a notion that I will return to later.

Once at the house Barbra is cared for by Ben (Duane Jones) who has already started to make the house safe. Despite having also witnessed the undead at their work, he remains active and alert. Barbra, on the other hand, cannot come to terms with what she has witnessed. She does not, at first, speak; she moves slowly, as if in a trance and pulls absently at her clothes; she seems hot. She continues to do this as she starts to tell Ben of the man that attacked her in the graveyard and of the death of her brother. Her voice is small, child-like, and it falters. As Barbra starts to describe the attack in greater detail, words fail her and she starts to scream hysterically. She leaps up and attacks Ben, screaming over and over again, "We've got to get Johnny! We've got to get Johnny!" She needs his body back, it seems, even though she knows him to be dead. She is inconsolable. Ben slaps her face and she faints. Placing Barbra on the sofa he calmly returns to his plan of action and gets the radio working. This scene is pertinent to the discussion of trauma and its visibility in popular film because it highlights two key issues: firstly, the notion of witness and the trauma of survival, and secondly, the placing of this trauma onto the female character. Gregory Waller suggests that the character of Barbra is a symbol of all trauma survivors: "Barbra

can offer Ben no assistance ... [she is] traumatized after she is forced to see the dead and the living dead."[20]

Here we start to see in *Night of the Living Dead* an engagement with the notion of traumatic witness and post-traumatic stress: a notion that is not recognized in explicit terms in the returning veteran films of this period and which is still absent from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Illness. The trauma of witness and of survival is shown here as being one in which Barbra's catatonic state exemplifies, as Waller's discussion suggests, that of the shell-shocked. Writing on the First World War, Trudi Tate states that war trauma was not an uncommon occurrence in civilians and in particular that women were often "subject to trauma."[21] She cites a study by Edwin Ash in 1919 which found that civilians often "exhibited symptoms like those of 'shell-shock of the battlefield'—'loss of voice, paralysis, ... sleeplessness, terrifying dreams' and so forth."[22] Thus, in a moment when civilians were being daily subject to news reports from Vietnam, Barbra's confrontation with the terror of the living dead exemplifies the trauma exhibited by civilians indirect and second-hand engagements with the battlefield. As Tate argues, when civilians "actually did imagine some of the horrible sights of the Great War, they became susceptible to war neuroses."[23] Barbra does not have to imagine though, she witnesses firsthand as the war is relocated onto American soil.

Night of the Living Dead is a low-budget horror movie and as such its aesthetics are not concerned with realism. The use of the media (radio and television news coverage) within the diegesis, however, to alert the people to the danger that lurks within their American nation, places a "realistic" edge on the otherwise excessive and visceral *mise-en-scène.*[24] Sumiko Higashi argues that it is the film's evocation of television news that exposes its propinquity with the Vietnam War. She suggests that the "shocking imagery associated with media reports of the Vietnam War ... seems especially apt for a horror film such as *Night of the Living Dead* in which the role of television is pivotal."[25] What Higashi is identifying here is the intertextual link between fictional representation and televised news reports, a link which would have been affectively experienced by the film's contemporary audience. *Night of the Living Dead* has a dual function for the televised news reports, using them to impart information to the audience about the nature of the zombies and as a narrative device to propel the characters to take a particular course of action to protect themselves. The reports within the film mimic the language of Vietnam War reports seen on nightly TV broadcasts in American homes.

For instance, the news reporter refers to a "search and destroy operation." The sense of verisimilitude becomes all the more apparent when we take into account that the field reporter in *Night of the Living Dead* is not an actor at all, but a local Pittsburgh broadcaster named Bill Cardille who, Romero confessed in a 1969 article in *Interview,* was asked to write his own copy on account of budget restrictions.[26] Cardille self-consciously incorporates the Vietnam jargon that he uses in his everyday job on local news into his news report for the film concerning the capture of the zombies. Although the war appears to be absent from the film in terms of plot, the language used to describe the National Guard's attempt to halt the cannibalistic reign of terror introduces it as a narrative device to explain the destruction of the zombies; the language used is shorthand for an audience already familiar with the need for "search and destroy" missions. Given that my reading of the film suggests that the zombies are symptoms of the anxiety of the loss of American life (rather than of the North Vietnamese), this destruction of the monster takes on another horrific turn. Those responsible for control of American society are indiscriminately destroying enemies which threaten the nation without consideration of the reason for their existence. This is exemplified by the shooting of Ben at the end of the film, a classic moment of friendly fire which reveals

America's indifference to both internal and external forms of racial otherness as the film not only speaks to the context of America's overseas war, but the visual evocation of a lynch mob through the all-white gang of hunters and their vicious dogs who surround the farm house also exposes the dark undercurrent of internal Civil Rights–era racial tensions.

Combined with hand-held cameras and grainy film stock, used by Romero for their low cost, the end of the film takes on a new aesthetic, suggestive of contemporaneous television news and documentary. After the *Night of the Living Dead*'s 1968 release, *Variety*'s disparaging review tellingly compares it to "20 year old army stock."[27] In the same year, the *New York Times* noted its "grainy" appearance and "wobbly" camera, but did not make the connection with newsreel. What is apparent at the end of the film is the move to a television news coverage style as the now-dead bodies are piled up for burning. The series of grainy stills of dead bodies are overlaid as the end credits roll to produce a photographic roll call of the dead, a documented image of absence. Thus, order is restored and anxieties surrounding the dead bodies are given a forum for expression when filtered through the lens of horror. These fears, however, are contained within the familiar aesthetic of documentary realism.

Director George A. Romero does not claim to have consciously produced any of the sub-textual readings that academics have attributed to his work. Over the years he has argued that "he was not aware of the politics of the film" and that critics read too much into "the creations they are studying."[28] In an interview in 1995, however, he concedes that the film is open to interpretation:

> It came out of the anger of the times. No-one was gleeful at the way the world was going, so these political themes were addressed in the film. The zombies could be the dead in Vietnam; the consequences of our mistakes in the past, *you name it*... [my emphasis].[29]

To "name it," I would argue that the repeated motif of the undead, the zombie — the present body but absent soul — in *Night of the Living Dead* signals a "recovered referentiality" within the text of MIA and POW soldiers whose absence was a continually validated presence within the public sphere in 1968.

In the six-year time period between the production and exhibition of *Night of the Living Dead* and *Deathdream* the engagement with the Vietnam War in the press and on television became increasingly preoccupied with the behavior of the returning veterans and the development of a "Vietnam Syndrome." In an article on June 7, 1971, in the *New York Times,* "'Syndrome' Found in Returned G.I.s," a mental health officer, Capt. Gene C. Wilkinson, states, "In the sense that the syndrome is a collection of symptoms, we definitely have a syndrome."[30] The symptoms that he goes on to describe of nightmares, flashbacks, restlessness, bouts of depression, and rage are familiar to our contemporary understanding of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, but this diagnosis was, as yet, still nine years away. The article also describes the mental condition of soldiers upon return to the United States: "There is alienation at being separated from wartime buddies and resentment over the indifferent welcome accorded them by their countrymen. For all these reasons there is a vague longing to return to Vietnam."[31] This sense of alienation is suggested as not only being related to the quiet return of these men without parade or hero status, but also connected to the difficulty of integration back into American society. Normal life seemed fraught with difficulties; in the same article Pfc. Alan Stogdill declares, "I should have stayed over there ... since we got back to [Fort] Benning ... it's been one detail after another."[32] His frustration is anchored in the feeling that life with his buddies in Vietnam was somehow simpler, however traumatic it appears to those at the home front.

The one-year tour of duty, typical of the Vietnam War, meant that there was a constant flow of returning soldiers to America while the war was still underway. This return of men

from war one-by-one is unique to the Vietnam period. On Monday, August 21, 1972, an article by Jon Nordheimer in the *New York Times* described the veterans as slipping "back into America with no bands playing and almost without notice"[33] and in 1970 psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton had described the soldiers as having to "sneak" back into American society.[34] These articles not only frame the returning veteran as victim by noting the lack of parades and their devalued status, but they also inadvertently represent the veteran as something sneaky and sinister, as a figure to be feared. There was a rapid repatriation for these veterans and within twenty-four hours of leaving Vietnam, they were back in American society. Dr. Jonathan Borus of the Walter Reed Army Hospital has argued that the men were "broken in" too rapidly; in Nordheimer's article Borus is quoted as saying: "My God, the Marines even bring them home in jungle fatigues."[35] Borus argues that these men are still "dressed to kill" when they arrive in the United States. These and other articles highlight the rapid succession of veterans brought into America who still "have the dust on their boots" from Vietnam. The notion of contamination that is apparent in *Night of the Living Dead* can be seen here through the fear that the traumas of war will be brought home with the returning soldiers. *Night of the Living Dead* is a prelude to later returning veteran films such as *First Blood* (dir. Ted Kotcheff, 1982) which portray the veteran as fueled by an unconscious desire to bring the war (and its traumas) home to the USA.

This fear is taken up explicitly in *Deathdream* in which a returning veteran, Andy, comes back to haunt his family and hometown as a blood-sucking zombie. After killing his family doctor, amongst other members of his neighborhood, Andy is driven by his mother to the town's cemetery where she helps him to bury himself in a grave he has prepared on his nightly jaunts. Once buried he is able to return to the dead and his mother can mourn at the graveside. She is the key to his release from the "living dead" and thus her trauma of loss needs to be resolved to enable his resolution. *Deathdream* opens in the combat zone (a low-budget imitation of jungle vegetation); bird song and insects can be heard as two soldiers stalk through the woods. Suddenly, grass and dead leaves on the ground are lit up by a barrage, airplanes are heard overhead, and GIs crouch behind a tree trunk. One soldier gets shot in the back and the second screams hysterically, "Darren! Jesus Christ, Darren!" The barrage lights up the wood again, illuminating the standing soldier as he looks down at his buddy; he is frozen to the spot. While the sound of his screaming fades, the camera pulls back, a single gunshot rings out, and the soldier, shot in the chest, falls backwards to the ground. An extreme close-up of his face becomes blurred as the credits begin. We hear a woman's voice calling, "Andy, Andy, Andy ... you can't die, Andy, you can't die, you promised, Andy, you promised...." as a distorted melody in a minor key heard as the camera pulls back and fades to black. The film cuts to the scene of a suburban house.

Although the film's opening exhibits the telltale musical cues of the horror genre, the iconic jungle combat scene anticipates what would become the conventions of the Vietnam War film. The juxtaposition of the woman's haunting voice with the distorted imagery of warfare set up a doubled notion of trauma: the trauma of battle is bound to the trauma of those left behind. The cut to the family house establishes the source of the ghostly voice, as a mother, father, and daughter sit to eat a roast dinner cooked by mother and badly carved by father. Robin Wood suggests that this prevents the film from falling "into the simplistic trap of innocent-boy-corrupted-by-horrors-of-war."[36] As he states, "It was not Vietnam alone that produced Andy's monstrousness," suggesting that the claustrophobic affectations of his mother and the ineffectual role model of his father are illustrative of the dysfunctional nuclear family under patriarchy.[37] As the family eats, the mother, Christine (Lynn Carlin), relates a tale of telling Andy's girlfriend Joanna that Andy has continued to write. This fabrication and the highly charged and excitable way in which the mother tells

her story anticipates her reaction and denial of the news that Andy has died, information that arrives by telegram during the meal. She screams, "No! It's a lie! It's a lie!" Later that night, she is out of bed, sitting in Andy's room, rocking in his chair while holding a candlelight vigil for her son. She intones: "You're all right, you're alive, I know, I can feel it, they lied": as she speaks the superimposed lights of a truck appear on screen, and as the truck stops to pick up a hitchhiker in army combats she continues, "you will come back." This denial of death and subsequent calling up of her son's spirit produces the sinister wish-fulfillment narrative that drives the rest of the film's plot-line: as with *Night of the Living Dead,* the trauma of loss produces a neurotic return of the un-dead and it is the female who once again gives voice to these anxieties.

Although it is the desire of a mother for the return of her son that drives the narrative, *Deathdream* also deals explicitly with the returning veteran and the tensions surrounding his return to civilian society. The narrative evocation of Vietnam Syndrome (PTSD) appears in Andy's behavior towards his neighbors and in the circumstances of the deaths of his victims. Andy does not only damage flesh to gorge himself on the blood of his victims, but also uses a hypodermic syringe to extract blood for later consumption. This link with drug abuse and use of narcotics during and after service in Vietnam is pertinent during this period as news agencies were beginning to report on wide-scale drug use among veterans. An article by Dana Adams Schmidt in 1972 highlights the difficulties that returning veterans had securing work if they received, for instance, an SPN 384 narcotics abuse code in their discharge papers.[38] Companies used these codes when selecting job candidates. One company in Schmidt's report admitted: "'The code number is the first thing we look at when we are hiring a veteran.'"[39] This type of discrimination labeled veterans beyond their immediate return and played into the clichéd stereotype of the unstable and unreliable veteran. This image is reinforced by Andy: his post-war habit can only be fed by the blood of his victims and his catatonic "zombie-state" is reminiscent of a cannabis-induced haze; his reticence to speak about his experiences echoes the silence of the post-traumatically stressed veteran.

One key scene exemplifies the social problem of re-integration. On Andy's second day home the young men of his street, five boys aged between approximately six and thirteen years old, come to visit. Andy sits in a garden chair and does not attempt to get up or move. He remains paralyzed, his static pose giving the illusion of a wheelchair-bound veteran. The children crowd around him and talk fast: "See a lot of action over there, Andy?"; "Hey, Andy, how come you ain't in uniform?"; "You know, my dad got a purple heart in Korea"; "Hey, Andy, I'm having karate!" This last comment is followed by the boy attempting to give Andy a karate chop. Andy grabs the child's hand tight and rises from his chair; the boy whimpers as he is forced to the ground. The family dog, a small terrier, appears at Andy's ankles and barks to protect the child. While still holding the boy with his right hand, Andy scoops up the dog with his left, holding him around the throat. The next action is extreme and somewhat farcical but its excess points to the ways in which the returning veteran was feared and demonized. In Nordheimer's article a veteran bemoans the ways in which civilians are fascinated by, but fail to understand the conditions of warfare:

> Why are they afraid of us? Family, friends and strangers? Why do they ask us questions about how many people we killed? I killed a few, but I don't want to talk about it. It was self-preservation. Why can't they understand that and let us alone?

As a clearer understanding of Vietnam Syndrome began to emerge in the 1970s, Andy's catatonic state, broken by bouts of violence, echoes the destructive elements of this condition. The hyperbolic display of these symptoms in *Deathdream* serves as a dark satire of the shell-shocked veteran.

While the children watch as Andy strangles the dog, the camera cuts between an extreme close up of his face. His eyes become bloodshot and are unblinking, his teeth are clenched and the children look on terrified and in tears. Andy only releases the dog when his father appears, shouting at him to stop. He dismisses the children, and looks directly at Andy. Father and son silently stare each other down. The father does not take his eyes from his son's face, but eventually his eyes narrow in a look of recognition. He shakes his head and walks away. What does this exchange of glances mean? Does the father recognize Andy's extreme and violent behavior? Has he witnessed this type of inappropriate violence before? As Jamie Russell points out Andy's "atrocities back on American soil are little different in scope than those he may have committed while acting in the service of his county."[40] After Andy's first bloody murder, of the truck driver who stopped to pick him up, the police question a waitress at the café where he stopped for coffee. She asks: "Why would a soldier want to do that?" The impossibility of an American soldier committing a brutal murder (at least to a fellow American) highlights the naivety of those on the home front and emphasizes the distance between the returning soldiers' experience of war in Vietnam and the American public's expectations of combat.

While writing this article I have pondered on the academic folly of "over reading" the narrative and aesthetic properties of film in the fashion George Romero wittily accuses his scholarly critics. I would argue that reading these films within their cultural context throws into relief issues and anxieties that were critical during the late '60s and early '70s in North American culture given the ubiquity of the Vietnam War in the newspaper and television of that period. Vietnam Syndrome was clearly an issue that affected civilians as well as the veterans of the war. As I sit at my desk I hear on BBC radio that the 300th British soldier has been killed in Afghanistan (June 21, 2010). To date there have been 2,070 coalition military fatalities in Afghanistan since 2001.[41] The media continues to report on the many global conflicts and disasters occurring in the world and this traumatic material continues to return through outlets such as fantasy and horror genres. In his 2010 article, "After Nearly a Decade of War, PTSD Is Afflicting the U.S. Military," Ryan Jaroncyk debates the statistics available on the current levels of trauma and the treatment available to serving military and veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. He found that "a study by the RAND Corporation revealed that 20 percent of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan will suffer from PTSD or severe depression; sadly only 50 percent of these veterans will get the treatment that they need."[42] The diagnosis of PTSD may now have an official status in the military and medical world, but its standing for veterans is still one of contention and fiscal difficulties. This issue then of the (in)visibility and (under)representation of the consequences of war is as pertinent today as it was in 1968.[43] Engaging with the popular and the fantastic brings to the fore the ways in which political and social events permeate our culture. The zombie as cultural cipher allows us an intellectual space to interrogate the issues and to defamiliarize the visceral realities of war that can become, tragically, so matter of fact when seen daily at the newspaper stands and shown on the news channels.

Notes

1. A shorter version of this chapter, "Lost Bodies/Lost Souls: *Night of the Living Dead* as MIA Narrative," appears in the Film and History conference proceedings, *Film and History: The War Film* (2004), CD-ROM.
2. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) entered the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association DSM-III* (Washington, D.C.) in 1980 as a reasoned nosology of symptoms that may be experienced by those who had witnessed a traumatic event outside of the experiences of everyday life.
3. Although referred to as ghouls in *NLD*, I take the notion of the undead to be inclusively zombie.
4. See Jeanette Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).

5. See Karen Randell, "Masking the Horror of Trauma: The Hysterical Body of Lon Chaney," *Screen* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 216–221.
6. See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).
7. Thomas Elsaesser, "Postmodernism as Mourning Work," *Screen* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 195.
8. R. H. W. Dillard, "*Night of the Living Dead*: It's not just a wind that's passing through," in Gregory A. Waller, ed., *Essays on the Modern American Horror Film* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 16.
9. Jane Caputi, "Films of the Nuclear Age," *Journal of Popular Television and Film* (Autumn 1998): 100–107.
10. Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (August 1988): 59–63.
11. Gregory A. Waller, ed., *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 4.
12. Sumiko Higashi, "A Horror Film about the Vietnam Era," in *Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 175–188.
13. Robin Wood, "The Return of the Repressed," *Film Comment* 14 (July-August 1978): 25–32.
14. Grateful thanks to the Newspaper Morgue at the Center for American History, the University of Texas at Austin. All newspaper clippings from the Veterans clipping file.
15. In 1996 there were still 2,143 American men listed as MIA. See Vernon E. Davis, *The Long Road Home: U. S. Prisoner of War Policy and Planning in Southeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2000), 7.
16. Cf. Waller, 16.
17. This is particular to the Vietnam War. In the First and Second World Wars the men were listed as Missing in Action, presumed dead. The presumption during the Vietnam War was that they were alive (captured).
18. Cf. Wood, "The Return of the Repressed," 25–32.
19. Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts on War and Death" (1915), in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIV* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 242.
20. Cf. Waller, 283.
21. Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), 13.
22. Edwin Ash, *The Problem of Nervous Breakdown* (London: Mills and Boon, 1919), quoted in Tate, 13.
23. Cf. Tate, 11.
24. The original was produced in black and white and later prints (post 1973) were colored. My analysis here concerns the original version.
25. Cf. Higashi, 184.
26. *Interview* 1, no. 4 (1969), 23.
27. "*Night of the Living Dead*" review, *Variety*, October 16, 1968, 6.
28. John Russo, *The Complete* Night of the Living Dead *Handbook* (Pittsburg: Imagine, 1985), 37.
29. Paul Wells, *The Horror Genre from Beelzebub to Blair Witch* (London: Wallflower Press, 2000), 80.
30. Ralph Blumenthal, "'Syndrome' Found in Returned G.I.'s," *New York Times*, June 7, 1971.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Jon Nordheimer, "Postwar Shock Besets Ex-G.I.'s; Postwar Shock is Found to Beset Veterans Returning From the War in Vietnam," *New York Times*, August 21, 1972.
34. Robert J. Lifton, "A Re-Examination," *New York Times*, August 20, 1970.
35. Nordheimer.
36. Robin Wood, "Deathdream," in Jamie Russell ed., *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema* (Surrey, UK: FAB Press, 2005), 124.
37. Ibid.
38. Dana Adams Schmidt, "Pentagon Studying Coded Data Filed on Misdeeds of Veterans," *New York Times*, March 12, 1972.
39. Ibid.
40. Jamie Russell, *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema* (Surrey, UK: FAB Press, 2005), 73.
41. "Operation Enduring Freedom," *iCasualties*, accessed September 6, 2010, http://icasualties.org/oef/.
42. Ryan Jaroncyk, "After nearly a decade of war, PTSD is afflicting the U.S. military," *RAWA News*, accessed September 6, 2010, http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/10.
43. For a current take on the returning dead of war as social commentary, see Joe Dante's *Homecoming* (2005) which is part of the *Masters of Horror* TV series: episode 1.6 (IDT Entertainment).

Shambling Towards Mount Improbable to Be Born: American Evolutionary Anxiety and the Hopeful Monsters of Matheson's *I Am Legend* and Romero's *Dead* Films

SEAN MORELAND

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

— W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

The extinction of old forms is the almost inevitable consequence of the production of new forms.

— Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*

I had come to the conclusion that there was nothing sacred about myself or about any human being, that we were all machines, doomed to collide and collide and collide....

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*

They are us! The same animal, simply functioning less perfectly.

— Dr. Logan, observing the walking dead in *Day of the Dead*

Dead is the new alive!

— Dr. Ryan Maydan, during Ottawa's 2008 Zombie-Walk

It is an infection — a disease — that much seems to be clear, and if you catch it, it turns you into a merely material shell, devoid of purpose beyond an inextirpable appetite. It transforms you into, or reveals you as all along having been nothing *but*, "pure, motorized instinct," a "lumbering robot," driven not by some higher plan, but by totalitarian microscopic processes that behaviorally manifest as one basic, indivisible drive: consumption-reproduction.[1]

While the first quoted phrase above is taken from an un-named expert in Romero's