

**COM 245
Spring 2019
Final Exam**

In the second half of the semester, three themes have guided our class sessions. First, we have seen the zombie as the product of a disease or at least of a biological condition, highly contagious and almost always fatal (although its victims continue to “live”). Second, zombies have served to deliver a biting (pun intended!) commentary on the late capitalist world we inhabit, characterized by materialistic consumption, mindless programming, and ever-greater social inequities. Third, most recently we have watched the zombie become a symbol for policies of dehumanization, brutalization, and incarceration, with the potential or actual consequence of rebellion, of a zombie “takeover” or a zombie “revolution.”

The three passages that follow present differing interpretations of how the zombie, whether cinematically or metaphorically, might be used to illuminate real-life conditions in today’s world.

1) Writing on the re-imagining of the original Haitian/Caribbean zombie by George Romero (and his imitators), John Cussans observes:

During the late ’60s and ’70s the traditional cinematic zombie undergoes a shocking and rapid mutation, acquiring newfound virulent and cannibalistic characteristics. The films of this period introduce the theme of a zombie plague and an apocalyptic and hyper-visceral epidemic....The cannibalistic mutation of the zombie functions as an explicit critique of “life” in late capitalist societies rather than an implicit critique of non-Western cultural practices (Haitian or otherwise).The postmodern zombie movie ultimately questions the possibility of effective democratic politics in the face of a ubiquitous global threat to all human life. In this sense—and also to the extent that it raises questions about what is truly human and what distinguishes “living” human life and “dead” human life—the postmodern cannibal-zombie works like his Haitian relatives. But it does so in an excessively violent, virulent, and collective manner. Ultimately these zombies aren’t working for anyone or anything, except perhaps for the end of all things and of every one.

“Teaching the Zombie Diaspora: From Subhuman Haiti to Postmodern Tucson,” in *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil* (Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2004).

2) In an essay on the increasingly disruptive and divisive problem of illegal immigration in Europe and America, Willem Schinkel writes:

Irregular immigrants can be regarded as a by-product of modernization and the remnants of former exploitation in what is known as the Third World. They are the by-products of the difference in standards of living between the self-proclaimed First World and other parts of the world....In the Netherlands, as in almost all European countries, migrants captured on account of their being “illegal” are incarcerated and if possible repatriated....Several detention centers exist to house irregular immigrants prior to their forced return home....The incarceration of irregular immigrants is indicative of a shift in policy from welfare state to penal state....Since the regular laws do not apply to him or her due to lack of citizenship or even “humanitarian status,” this alien can be incarcerated for an indefinite period of time....The illegal immigrant is located at the crossroads of debates about globalization, the state, justice, human rights, and citizenship, to name a few....Many immigrants are incarcerated because their identity is unknown. Their identity, then, is reduced to “having no known identity.” Their place of incarceration is a non-place in the sense that no positive identity can be gained from dwelling in it—which is a permanent state of transition, of living in a void.

“‘Illegal Aliens’ and the State, or Bare Bodies vs. the Zombie,” *International Sociology*, 24/6 (November 2009).

3) Finally, writing in the context of the policies, foreign and domestic, that characterized the Bush Administration from 2001 to 2009, Henry Giroux has this to say about the state of America:

Only a decade or so ago, citizens feared the wrath of robots—terminators and cyborgs—who wanted to destroy us, the legacy of a highly rationalized, technocratic culture that eludes human regulation, even comprehension. That moment has passed....At present Americans are fascinated by a different kind of monstrosity, by vampires and zombies condemned to live an eternity by feeding off the souls of the living....Death-dealing politicians and their acolytes support modes of corporate and militarized governance through which entire populations now become redundant, disposable, or criminalized....There are no zombie-free spaces in this politics, as a country paralyzed by fear has become the site of a series of planned precision attacks on constitutional rights, dissent, and justice itself. Torture, kidnappings, secret prisons, preventive detention, illegal domestic spying, and the dissolution of habeas corpus have become the protocol of a newly fashioned dystopian mode of governance....Zombie politics supports mega-corporations that cannibalize the economy, feeding off taxpayer dollars while undercutting much needed spending for social services. The vampires of Wall Street reach above and beyond the trajectories of traditional politics, exercising an influence that has no national or civic allegiance, displaying an arrogance that is as unchecked as its power is unregulated....Zombie politics are everywhere backed up by an army of zombie economic advisors, lobbyists, and legislators, all of whom seem to revel in spreading the culture of the undead while feasting on the spread of war, human suffering, violence, and catastrophe across the United States and the larger globe.

“Zombie Politics and Other Late Modern Monstrosities in the Age of Disposability,” *Truthout* (online), November 2009.

Drawing references and examples from the films we’ve watched and discussed in the second half of the semester (including those described in the in-class presentations), write an essay on **which of these three commentaries best forecasts where zombies are going next and what role they will play in our near-term future.**

Yes, this requires a measure of advanced thinking. But as we agreed at the start of the semester, this course has not been about just watching zombie movies. It has been about discovering what zombie movies tell us about ourselves, the values we claim to uphold, and the places we think we may be heading.

4 to 5 pages, double-spaced, e-mailed to me as a Word attachment no later than 4 PM on Wednesday, May 1st, using the college e-mail system. Watch for a confirmation from me. **If you don’t get an acknowledgement from me, I haven’t received your exam.**