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CIVILIZATION OF THE LIVING DEAD: CANONICAL MONSTROSITY, THE
ROMERO ZOMBIE, AND THE POLITICAL SUBJECT

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
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Abstract

CIVILIZATION OF THE LIVING DEAD: CANONICAL MONSTROSITY, THE
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Nicholas W. Robbins

Advisor: Professor Corey Robin

This dissertation analyzes the canonical monsters of Western political theory, including Plato's wolf-man, Hobbes's Leviathan and Tocqueville's mechanical mass. It argues that monster theorists – including horror film director George A. Romero, creator of the zombie and its apocalyptic narrative – utilize the horror genre in order to reveal the hidden dysfunctions and unrealized potentials of self and society. The canon features several prison-like heuristics – including Plato's cave, Hobbes's state of nature, Tocqueville's prison, and Romero's zombie apocalypse – that bring to light the mass enslavement, intellectual dysfunction, appetitive tyranny, and cannibalism of the political subject. Theorists consistently depict cannibal machines – such as Marx's factory and Arendt's concentration camp – that devour unconscious automaton masses. This raises the question: is civilization, as it has been constituted, worth the living death and cannibal consumption that it entails? Monster theorists use the monster not only to reveal our deepest dysfunctions, but also to inspire us to transcend, through various forms of collective rationality, the appetitive tyranny that imprisons humanity.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, who showed me the value of unorthodox perspectives and alternative forms of knowledge, and who always supported me as I found my own path.

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Chapter 1—Introduction: Political Theory and the Monster

Dreams and Beasts are two keys by which we are to find out the secrets of our nature.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Introduction

The canon of Western political theory contains many monstrous figures. In Plato's *The Republic* the reader encounters the predatory "drone" of oligarchy (Plato, 1955/1987, trans., 552c), the "large and powerful animal" of democracy (493a-b), and the wolf-man tyrant, a popular leader who will "change from man to wolf and make himself tyrant" after he "tastes a single piece of human flesh" (566a, 565d). Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, notes that ancient authors had the learned centaur Chiron – who is "half beast and half man" – instruct princes in the art of leadership, for the successful prince, like this mythic monster, must "know how to act according to the nature of both" beast and man (1961/1986, p. 99). In the introduction to *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes society as "an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural" (1962/1966, p. 19). Hobbes hopes that this gigantic mechanism, assembled from the bodies of its automaton subjects, will conquer the nightmarish state of nature, where "*Man is a wolf to Man*" (1998, p. 4). In *Capital*, Marx depicts capital as a vampire-like entity that sucks the life out of its wage-slaves through the medium of a giant mechanical monster: "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (1967/1992, p. 224). Nietzsche's blond beast, Arendt's living dead camp automatons, Sartre's colonial zombies, and Nozick's "utility monster" are some of the many other noteworthy instances of canonical monstrosity.

The monster – derived from the Latin *monstrum* – is a “revelation” and “warning.” As a critical image of the human, it reveals hidden and unknown psychic dysfunction: destructive appetites, overpowering passions, torturous ontological formations, and dangerous mental delusions. It shows us those hidden aspects of our selves that give rise to our personal and collective demons, but that go unexamined in normal waking consciousness. Monsters embody the conflicts that plague the psyche and tear apart the social fabric, and thus constitute a catalog of human dysfunction.

This dissertation shows that the monster is an enduring form of revelation and character critique within Western political thought. I argue that the subterranean theme of the Western tradition, as revealed by its monsters, is that civilization is cannibalistic. Theorists consistently depict civilization as a monstrous entity that consumes the minds and bodies of its slavish subjects. The cannibalistic dynamic that I track from Plato’s *The Republic* to the contemporary zombie apocalypse narrative suggests that Western civilization is not worth the self-sacrifice and appetitive violence that it imposes upon those it domesticates and normalizes.

This dissertation further argues that independent horror film director George A. Romero intervenes in a long-standing canonical examination of human monstrosity. Like his canonical predecessors, Romero explores the themes of psychic slavery, beastly appetite, and cannibalism in his series of zombie films, beginning with the classic *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Romero condenses and accentuates previous critiques of the democratic mass, depicting Americans as dead corpses living under the tyranny of appetite. Setting his films within sites of domestic normality such as the home and the shopping mall, Romero highlights the violent, fragmenting, and deadening nature of

public and private life in America. His films reveal contemporary American civilization to be a gigantic cannibal apparatus that implodes as its living dead subjects become possessed by animal appetite.

The story of the monster is central to its revelatory functioning. The typical narrative divides the world into human and monstrous space, light and dark, known and unknown. The story begins with the appearance of a monstrous threat, and it concludes with a heroic representative form the social order defeating the monster and reinstating the normal human-monster spatial mapping. The monster narrative is structured around a specific set of character types or subject positions: monster, victim, and hero. In the typical Gothic narrative these roles are performed by an abnormal other, a threatened woman, and a courageous man, respectively. This dissertation examines the canon of political theory through the lens of the monster, showing how theorists utilize and modify the spatial mapping, linear trajectory, and subject positions of the monster/horror genre.¹

While monster theory informs us that monsters are representations of the normal self, the standard horror narrative – from *Beowulf* to *Dracula* (1992) – typically locates monstrosity outside of self and society, in abnormal bodies and foreign lands. It depicts heroic social authorities destroying monstrous others and upholding human normalcy. The epistemological nature of the monster suggests that the age-old process of monstrous projection upon the other should be inverted in the name of critical self-examination and self-overcoming. This is precisely what Plato, Hobbes, Tocqueville and Romero do.

¹ The monster is that hybridic, impure, frightening and destructive being around which the horror genre revolves (Carroll, 1991). As Wood (1986/2003) points out, the formula of the horror film is “normality is threatened by the monster” (p. 71). While the monster is technically distinct from horror, horror and monstrosity are so intertwined that it is not unreasonable to use them interchangeably. In this dissertation “monster genre” and “horror genre” thus refer to the same set of figures/narratives.

They refuse to see the monster as the other that must be destroyed. Instead, they view it as something from within the normal self, and as a product of the social order.

Furthermore, they do not provide the kind of narrative closure that a classical monster story does: with the monster slain. The monster remains, haunting audiences with their own unknown otherness.

The story of the monster is a political story. In the 1970s – “the Golden Age of the American horror film” (Wood, 1986/2003, p. 63) – human monsters are depicted as the product of dominant social and political institutions, including the family, the news media, local law enforcement, the military, the scientific establishment, and the government. As I examine in chapter 6, the zombies of Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* arise from the horrific institutions, deadening spaces, and oppressive relationships of daily existence in 1960s American society. Like Romero, and the other masters of political horror who came to prominence in the 1970s,² canonical political theorists view the monster as a product of domestic institutions. They do not mimic the ritualistic expulsion of the horror genre, but instead transcend it. In their hands, the monster becomes a call to awaken from the invisible prison of excessive appetite, unruly passion, and phantasmagoric illusion in which they see humanity enslaved.

In the final moments of *Diary of the Dead* (2007), Romero shows us two white men with guns walking through a field in the countryside. They have suspended a zombified woman in mid-air by tying her hair to a tree branch. With sadistic glee, they shoot her in the face, separating the top of her head from the rest of her body, which falls

² These include Wes Craven, Larry Cohen, John Carpenter, and Tobe Hooper. Few others have matched their talent for using the horror film to critically interrogate American society.

to the earth.³ Romero's narrator, who has watched a recording of this scene on her computer, asks the audience: "are we worth saving?" Each of my monster theorists raises similar questions: Is civilization worth its monstrous consequences? What is lost in the creation of a polity? What is to be done about the appetitive tyranny that dominates the "civilized"? Along with Socrates we might ask: "Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature? (Plato, 2002, trans., 230e).

Political Theory and the Monster

While it may be relatively easy to overlook Marx's depiction of capital as a vampire in "The Working-Day" chapter of *Capital* (1967/1992, p. 224), it is almost impossible for those who study modern political thought not to comment upon Hobbes's Leviathan. In fact, the obviously monstrous nature of Hobbes's work has made the discussion of Hobbesian monstrosity somewhat unavoidable within political theory. Indeed, a few scholars have provided in-depth analysis of Hobbes's Leviathan and wolf-man figures (Agamben, 1998; Ng, 2012; Rossello, 2012; Schmitt, 1938/2008; Stillman, 1995; Springborg, 1995). But they have not situated Hobbes's monsters within the broader historical and thematic context of canonical monstrosity. And relatively little has been written about Platonic monstrosity and Tocquevillian monstrosity. Furthermore, no one has compared different theorists in respect to the horrific and monstrous aspects of their work.

³ The two men in this scene are white. From the posse in *Night of the Living Dead* to the feuding patriarchs in *Survival of the Dead*, the violent white man with a gun is a recurring figure in Romero's zombie films.

What are the reasons for this lack of attention to the monsters of the canon? At first glance, the monster does not appear to be an object that is worthy of serious intellectual consideration. It is a fantastical and often grotesque creature. And it is inextricably linked to horror, which has traditionally been the most disreputable of genres (second, perhaps, only to pornography), the site of debased taste and adolescent titillation. What intellectual value could such figures possibly hold for the study of political thought? A great deal, I argue. As noted above, the monster makes visible – through its abnormality, its disfigurements, its disgusting excesses – the invisible effects of political power and subjection. It is precisely the monster’s ontological aberrations and disruptive behavior that enable monstrous revelation and warning, and that make it potentially valuable to political theory.

Political theorists might avoid studying monsters because “the subject of monsters contains too much meaning” (Poole, 2011, p. xv). Indeed, several scholars of monstrosity emphasize the complexity and amorphous meaning of the monster (Cohen, 1996; Halberstam, 1995; Poole, 2011; Žižek, 1992/2008). According to Cohen, the hybridic body of the monster makes attempts at “systematic structuration” impossible (1996, p. 6). The apparently ungraspable nature of the monster is perhaps one of the reasons why political theorists – and members of any discipline that focuses upon “systematic structuration” of abstract philosophical categories – opt for simpler and more stable objects of analysis.

Aside from the apparent intellectual unworthiness of the monster, and its complexity of meaning, the neglect of the monster within political theory is likely an effect of disciplinary boundaries. Scholars of the monster normally work within those

disciplines that study art, folklore, literature, and film, media within which monsters have most frequently been produced. Political theorists, like other knowledge producers, are disciplined by their discipline. They follow the conventions and practices that define their field and constitute their professional identity. Film theorists, art historians, and cultural anthropologists are more likely than political theorists to find peers and mentors who study monsters. By building upon the work of those theorists who have studied monsters, I hope to further open the field of political theory to the fascinating subject of monstrosity.

A few contemporary theorists – including Michael Rogin (1987/1988, 1998), Donna Haraway (1991), Jodie Dean (1998), and Slavoz Žižek (1992/2008) – have examined monsters from American popular culture. These thinkers have analyzed Hollywood films like *The Birds* (1963) and *Independence Day* (1996), or specific monsters like the cyborg and the alien.

Jodie Dean examines the alien as a cultural and discursive phenomenon in *Aliens in America* (1998). Since the 1950s, Americans have shown a cultural fascination with stories of alien invasion and abduction. The alien has since proved to be one of the most popular monsters in American popular culture, appearing in films like *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *Independence Day* (1996), and *War of the Worlds* (2005), and in the enormously successful television series *The X-Files* (1993-2002). Dean argues that the contemporary proliferation of alien conspiracy theories reflects the breakdown of a common reality within an age of dispersed information networks. She does not view this psychic investment in the alien as a negative phenomenon, for it shows a willingness to challenge dominant frames of

reference, which are often constructed upon ideological fictions. Her work thus confirms a central thesis of the monster/horror literature: individuals turn to the monster to process collective anxieties and reconfigure their worldview during times of significant social change.

In the same year that Dean published her investigation into American paranoia in the Information Age, Michael Rogin released his *ID4* (1998), a close reading of the internationally popular film *Independence Day* (1996). Featuring such characters as a brash black fighter pilot (Will Smith), his stripper girlfriend (Vivica A. Fox), a neurotic Jewish scientist (Jeff Goldblum), and a kind and brave President (Bill Pullman), this film tells the sensational yet banal story of an American-led global victory over hostile alien invaders. Rogin argues that *Independence Day* – which was endorsed by the presidential candidates for both the Republican and Democratic parties (Bob Dole and Bill Clinton, respectively) – deploys science fiction tropes to re-imagine the national historical narrative in a way that defends American power and the dominant ideological norms upon which it rests.

Rogin undertakes a broader historical enquiry into “political demonology” in his classic *Ronald Reagan, the Movie* (1987/1988), where he argues that American politics is often dominated by monstrous figures spawned from the anxious dream life of the nation, including “the Indian cannibal” and “the many-tentacled Communist conspiracy” (p. xiii). According to Rogin, “the countersubversive needs monsters to give shape to his anxieties and to permit him to indulge his forbidden desires” (p. xiii). In his account, monsters are not simply fictive beings found in entertaining spectacles; they are the products of a collective fantasy life that has constructed subjects and pervaded politics

since the birth of the nation. While Rogin argues that countersubversives in particular rely upon monsters in order to persecute the other, this dissertation examines theorists who utilize monstrosity in order to critique self and society. In other words, I focus upon monsters that have been constructed to reveal the hidden dysfunctions of the social order, not those that have been used to defend that order through monstrous projection and violence.

Donna Haraway (1991) analyzes another popular science fiction figure in “A Cyborg Manifesto.” She approaches the cyborg as a “promising monster,” one that can be used to disrupt traditional representations of women as natural beings that must be incorporated within the masculine symbolic order. For Haraway, the cyborg challenges the binary logic of Western identity construction, disrupting classical ontological distinctions like self/other, male/female, and mind/body. Like Hobbes, she blurs the boundaries between human, animal and machine, but for the purposes of opposing totalizing origin narratives like *Genesis*, and embracing the utopian potential of the post-human.

In his books and documentaries Slavoz Žižek (1992/2008) discusses several monstrous figures and horror films through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁴ For example, in *The Perverts Guide to Cinema* (2006), he interprets the killer flock of *The Birds* – which appears immediately after the young male protagonist meets a female love interest – as “the maternal superego.” In *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (2007), he defines the monster in terms of German Idealism: “Hegel radicalized Kant by conceiving the void of the Thing (its inaccessibility) as equivalent to the very negativity that defines the

⁴ In *The Perverts Guide to Cinema* (2006) and *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* (2012), he discusses classic horror films like *Frankenstein* (1931), *Psycho* (1960), *The Birds* (1963), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Jaws* (1975), *Alien* (1979), and *They Live!* (1988).

subject,” Žižek argues (p. 158). Beneath the social persona with which humans identify is a pure void that possesses the power of philosophical negativity, of negation and synthesis (what Hegel calls the Understanding). “In its most radical dimension,” he continues, the ‘subject’ is *nothing but* this dreaded ‘void’—in *horror vacui*, the subject simply fears himself, his constitutive void” (p. 158). The Thing that humans fear is not an alien from another galaxy, but “the Buddhist proposition that oneself, the subject, does not exist” (p. 257). It is not possible to literally represent the nothingness of the subject, but the monster, through its strange ontology, negates the common image of the self, and thereby exposes the gap and dynamic relationship between the self and its void. “The place where phantasmagorical monsters emerge is thus identified as the void of the pure Self” (p. 158); “*the monster is the subject himself, conceived as Thing*” (p. 157). In his signature style of provocative exclamation, Žižek applies this definition to himself during an interview presented within the documentary *Zizek!* (2005):

I am not human, I am a monster, I claim. It's not that I have a mask of a theoretician and beneath I am a more human person...I rather prefer myself as somebody who, not to offend others, pretends, plays that he is human.

Like many monster scholars, Žižek acknowledges the historical and social dimensions of monstrosity, arguing that “the social impact of capital,” which is a “terrifying force of ‘deteritorialization’, is “the ultimate ‘social mediation’ of the monster figure,” and therefore “it is by no accident that ‘monsters’ appear at every break which announces a new epoch of capital” (1992/2008, p. 160). Therefore although monsters are, for Žižek, the expression of a post-Enlightenment experience of the void within the self, specific monsters express different forms of that experience: Frankenstein’s monster

arises with capitalism; the phantom of the opera with imperialism; the living dead with “postindustrial” society (p. 160).

In 2002, the zombie – a reanimated cannibal corpse – began appearing throughout American popular culture, in movies, video games, literature, and several other cultural forms. In 2005, Paul Wells coined the phrase “zombie renaissance” to describe this phenomenon (Bishop, 2010). Intellectuals from several disciplines have become increasingly interested in monstrosity and horror during the zombie renaissance. Numerous essays, articles and books on the zombie have appeared during this time. While several of these works draw upon the thinking of canonical political theorists – including Aristotle (Walker, 2010), Hobbes (Murray, 2010), Rousseau (Cole, 2010), Marx (Lutz, 2010), Freud (Bishop, 2010; Clark, 2010), Adorno (Maurizi, 2004), and Derrida (Leverette, 2008) – they do not address the monstrous figures within canonical political texts, or situate the zombie within the context of canonical monstrosity. In this respect, their approach to monstrosity is similar to that of the political theorists surveyed above.

Hannah Pitkin and Jacques Derrida do turn their attention to isolated instances of canonical monstrosity, examining monstrous aspects in the work of Arendt and Marx, respectively. In *Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (1998), Pitkin argues that Arendt paints a picture of the social that resembles the protoplasmic alien invader found in *The Blob* (1958), an entity from outer space that grows as it ingests the citizens of a small town. Like the blob, Arendt's social assimilates citizens, destroying their individuality in the process. In *Specters of Marx* (1993/1994), Derrida examines the relationship between Marx and the ghost. He reads *The Communist Manifesto* alongside

Hamlet, discussing the temporal and discursive functioning of the specter in these works. Considering the relationship between the fall of communism and the status of Marxism, he looks to the revenant not only as a literary figure, but also as a spectral embodiment of the unfulfilled demand for social justice, which continues to haunt society in the age of supposed neo-liberal consensus. Although these texts discuss canonical monsters, they do not provide an overview of the monstrous figures and horrific narratives of their thinkers within a comparative perspective.⁵

This dissertation offers an interdisciplinary contribution to political theory, monster studies and American popular culture in the spirit of theorists like Rogin, Dean and Žižek. Analyzing the monstrous figures of *The Republic*, *Leviathan*, *Democracy in America*, and *Night of the Living Dead* – as well as those found in Romero’s other zombie films⁶ – I trace the dynamic of cannibalistic self-destruction that has recently come to the fore during the zombie renaissance.

Canonical Monster Theorists

This dissertation begins the work of mapping out the history of the relationship between political theory and the monster. Its aim is twofold. First, at the empirical level, it seeks to establish the monster as a recurring theme within political theory. What are the attributes of the canonical monsters? What patterns, if any, exist amongst these figures? Second, while establishing a canon of monstrosity, this dissertation explains the

⁵ For example, a study of Marxian monstrosity would entail an examination not only of the specter, but also of the “vampire-like” capital, the “mechanical monstrosity” that fills the horrific factory, and the alienated wage-slaves that are “appendages of the machine.” The specter is surely a significant figure within Marx’s monstrosity, but so are the vampire and the automaton. Furthermore, the monsters that one finds in Marx take on a new light when they are viewed in relation to the mechanistic monstrosities of past and future theorists, including Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and Arendt’s camp.

⁶ Romero’s zombie films are: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and *Survival of the Dead* (2009). Romero wrote, but did not direct, the remake of *Night of the Living Dead* (1990).

ways in which the monster functions within these works, focusing upon how theorists use monsters to critique political subjectivity and social institutions, as well as to call us to take up the hero's journey of self-examination and transformation.

Of the canonical theorists whose work contains compelling instances of monstrosity, why focus upon Plato, Hobbes, and Tocqueville? Several other canonical theorists – including Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Arendt and Foucault – also make extensive use of monster imagery. Four criteria generated this group. First, monstrosity is an obvious and significant component of their work. Several theorists draw upon the mythic power and aesthetic impact of the monster to adorn or add a rhetorical flourish to their arguments. In contrast, monstrosity suffuses the texts and arguments of my monster theorists, coloring their vision of the world, performing a significant critical and revelatory function. Second, my theorists were chosen according to the time period in which they wrote, so that a historical sampling of canonical monstrosity could be produced. Third, my theorists subvert the traditional horror genre by locating the monster within the self, instead of within the other. They refuse to provide the typical narrative closure, which expels the monstrous other in order to reinstate the symbolic order. At the end of their narratives, the monster remains.⁷ Fourth, each of my theorists speaks to general monstrous themes that appear throughout the history of monstrosity, including solipsism, beastly appetite, and cannibalism. This thematic overlap allows me to develop a dialogue among these theorists on the nature of human monstrosity.

⁷ Hobbes is somewhat of an exception on this point. His heroic Leviathan triumphs, banishing the wolf-man from civil society. And yet, his hero is a giant cannibal who has consumed its subjects. As I discuss in chapter 4, Hobbes never actually conquers the wolf-man despite his intense desire to do so. The wolf-man haunts his civil society (Rossello, 2012). Thus Hobbes does not really defeat the monster and offer us narrative closure. Instead, he changes the form of the monster, from the wolf-man to the man-machine.

Not every theorist or individual text is equal in respect to monstrosity. Several theorists make passing reference to a monster, or subtly invoke horrific imagery. For example, in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari mention the zombie in passing: “The only modern myth is the myth of zombies – mortified schizos, good for work, brought back to reason (1972/2005, p. 335). (Here they appear to have the slave-labor zombie of Haitian folklore in mind, not the Romero cannibal zombie. Modern society, they believe, deadens individuals through schizophrenic subjection, and then inserts them into the rationality of capitalist production.) In the introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre (1961/1966) also uses the zombie, in this case to represent the dehumanized condition of both the colonized and the colonizers. Addressing his European audience, he writes,

you it was who allowed them glimpses of light, to you only did they dare speak, and you did not bother to reply to such zombies... Turn and turn about; in these shadows from whence a new dawn will break, it is you who are the zombies. (pp. 12)

In contrast to these isolated appearances of monstrous rhetoric, monstrosity suffuses the texts of the writers I am examining. *The Republic*, *Leviathan*, and *Democracy in America* are epic theoretical texts that contain frequent and persistent visions of human monstrosity.

These works present monstrous visions in different temporal worlds, and therefore provide material for a historical sampling of canonical monstrosity, from the ancient to the modern to the contemporary. Plato introduces ancient monstrous figures like the cave and the wolf-man, which appear throughout the history of Western

monstrosity. Hobbes bridges the ancient and modern world, envisioning a giant man-machine that conquers the nightmarish state of nature and its cannibal wolf-men.

Tocqueville foresees a modern dystopian landscape in which a monstrous bureaucratic apparatus shepherds a passive mass of mechanical brutes. And Romero depicts a mass of re-animated cannibal corpses that devastate the machinery of contemporary American civilization.

Each of my theorists deploys a horrific heuristic or dark and twisted monstrous space – the cave, the state of nature, the American penitentiary, the zombie apocalypse – in order to screen and critique aspects of appetitive, intellectual and social dysfunction that would otherwise remain unseen. Whereas Plato and Hobbes imagine their constructs, Tocqueville finds his in the reformed penitentiary of Jacksonian America. Like Plato's degeneration narrative, and Hobbes's state of nature, Romero's zombie apocalypse is a meditation on the causes and consequences of societal self-destruction. He examines the breakdown of civilization – in terms of personal psychology, group dynamics, and political institutions – and shows the havoc and grotesquery that proliferates as monstrosity colonizes human space.

My canonical monster theorists deploy these horrific heuristics in order to show us that our lives are far more miserable and pathetic – and that we are far more dangerous and destructive – than we consciously realize. They hope to persuade their audiences into taking the necessary steps to de-animalize, humanize, and/or spiritualize themselves. They aim to transform humans from isolated and miserable brutes into a harmonious collective body.

The horrific visions and monsters of my theorists overlap and connect in significant ways. Each theorist focuses upon the themes of blindness/dulled cognition, mass enslavement, the animal appetites overtaking the human, monstrous consumption, and political tyranny. They believe our appetites enslave us, and that part of what makes us into monsters is that enslavement. Plato and Hobbes both draw upon the cannibal wolf-man – which is somewhat similar to the zombie – in order to represent appetitive tyranny, while Tocqueville worries that the “taste for material gratification” will transmogrify democratic citizens into a mass of apathetic consumers fit for despotism. For each of my theorists, tyranny haunts democracy; it is the monstrous shadow and potential future of the blind and hungry mass.

My theorists utilize a similar set of monstrous figures. The human monsters of the canon tend to be either slavish mechanisms (the automaton) or monstrous consumers (the cannibal). The former constitutes a version of human-machine hybridism, and reveals the presence of mechanical behavior, the absence of vitality. The latter is a human-animal hybrid, indicating an excess of beastly appetite, and a lack of reason and self-control. Each of my theorists also depicts society as a cannibal machine that consumes and enslaves its subjects.

Although theorist puts their own touch upon the monster, the underlying types – the productive mechanism and the cannibal consumer – remain essentially the same over time. Indeed, the monsters that I examine usually fall into one or the other category. However, some figures – especially those born at moments of historical transition – contain elements of both. For example, Tocqueville’s democratic individual is, on the one hand, a hard-working, money-loving body that functions in a mechanistic fashion.

On the other hand, Tocqueville also speaks of the “taste for material gratifications,” which at times drives the American people into a wild pursuit of material goods. Indeed, he notes the presence of unruly beastly appetite within the mechanical mass, and thus foreshadows the breakdown of the 1950s automaton personality that Romero will envision in *Night of the Living Dead*.

I claim that each of my theorists participates in an ancient and on-going critique of political subjectivity. They utilize similar horrific heuristics, feature similar monsters, discuss similar monstrous themes, and tell similar stories. In other words, a pattern of monstrosity has endured over time, from Plato to Romero. This dissertation pays close attention to how Plato’s degeneration narrative and Romero’s zombie apocalypse bookend an overarching canonical horror story. As I examine in chapter 3, Plato’s theory of monstrous degeneration accounts for the defining features and evolution of the zombie, from the slavish automatons of *White Zombie* (1932) to the pleasure-seeking mass of *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) to the sadistic killing machines of *28 Days Later* (2002). Hobbesian monstrosity reflects the ascendancy of the oligarchic/bourgeois man-machine civilization in the 17th century. Tocqueville reflects upon the horrific nature and instability of this configuration in 19th century America. And Romero destroys the machine, and releases the beast, in the middle of the twentieth century.

Relevant Literature

What do the literatures on Plato, Hobbes, Tocqueville and Romero contribute to an understanding of monstrosity within their work? While Plato is one of the most studied theorists in the canon, relatively little has been written about his view of monstrosity or his specific monsters, including the drone, the beastly mass, and the wolf-

man. Plato scholars discuss his theory of the soul, his story of societal degeneration, and the cave allegory in terms of moral psychology, epistemology, ontology, and metaphysics. They do not however study these categories as instances of horror and monstrosity.

In *The Republic*, Plato's Socrates constructs a three-part hybrid monster in order to convey the nature of human psychic disfigurement. He asks us to imagine that a many-headed beast (excessive appetite) and a roaring lion (untamed spirit) are hidden within a starving man (weakened reason) (588b-588e). In *On Monsters* (2009), philosopher Stephen Asma briefly discusses this psychological model, noting that Plato is concerned with "monstrous desire," which is the result of appetite usurping the ruling position within the soul from reason. Kearney (2003) similarly points out that Socrates views monstrosity as the other of reason (p. 14). However, these discussions are brief or partial. In *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (2006), philosopher Hendrik Lorenz examines the minutiae of Plato's division of the soul into reason, spirit and appetite, but he does not address the specific monsters arising from Plato's theory.

Scholars interested in Plato's views of moral psychology and regime types frequently discuss his notion of societal derivation. According to this theory, the different forms of political society devolve one from the other in the following succession: aristocracy or kingship (the perfect society), timarchy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. Each form of society corresponds to a unique character type: oligarchy to the oligarch, democracy to the democrat, etc. A different object of desire motivates each character: the oligarch desires money, the democrat seeks liberty, and the tyrant pursues power over others. Plato argues that excess is the cause of change in society and its

corresponding characters. Degeneration occurs through a process whereby excess in one direction violently explodes into excess in the opposite direction. The oligarchic character leads a narrow economic existence, pursuing money and repressing all other desires, which results in the emergence of a class of drones, dissolute and destructive consumers. The drones lead the democratic revolution and become the leaders of the democratic mass. The excessive liberty of democracy eventually transforms into its opposite: the demand for absolute subjection. That is, the democratic mass embraces a popular champion who eventually becomes the tyrant. In *Plato's Fable* (2006), Joshua Mitchell shows how Plato's narrative of degeneration anticipates the historical character types that future canonical theorists – from Hobbes to Nietzsche to Tocqueville to Rawls – will describe and critique. However, he does not consider this tale from the angle of monstrosity.

The cave of Plato's allegory is a subterranean pit of slavery and deception. Scholars typically analyze the cave as an exercise in Platonic epistemology and metaphysics, not as a monstrous space. A notable exception is found in Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), in which she reflects upon the gendered nature of otherness within Plato's allegory. Noting the similarity between the cave and the womb, she argues that Plato's story is a mythic representation of the feminine other from which the philosopher must escape in order to become enlightened.⁸

Irigaray (1985) provides a link between Plato scholarship and classic works of feminist horror film scholarship, like Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993). Creed draws upon Julia Kristeva's (1980/1982) concept of abjection, which includes the

⁸ See Krumnow (2009) for a discussion of Irigaray's deconstruction of the cave. Krumnow argues that the cave's resemblance to the womb, for Irigaray, reflects Plato's elevation of the masculine over the feminine.

idea that the masculine symbolic order associates the female with categories of defiling otherness like excrement and other bodily secretions. These liminal substances trouble the distinction between self and not-self, and threaten to rupture the notion that there is a self at all, at least as Western philosophical discourse has conceived it.⁹ The masculine symbolic order must reject these instances of monstrous otherness – which it associates with women and thus identifies as feminine – in order to maintain its self-identity. Creed reads horror films as rituals in which audiences confront and attempt to expel aspects of the monstrous feminine, including the archaic mother (*Alien*), the castrating mother (*Psycho*), and “woman as monstrous womb” (*The Brood*).

While this dissertation considers gender in relation to the subject positions of horror (monster, victim, and hero) – especially within the films of Romero, but also in relation to Hobbes’s social contract narrative – gender does not constitute one of my primary lenses of analysis. In part, this is due to the fact that each of my theorists universalizes monstrosity, victimization and heroism. Everyone is susceptible to the monstrosity and victimization of the cave, the state of nature, the democratic mass, and the zombie horde. And everyone must collectively awaken from the nightmare of intraspecies predation. For Romero, it is particularly important to re-address historical imbalances in the subject positions of the genre. He consistently presents black men and white women as communitarian heroes who oppose hyper-individualism, while advocating cooperation and collective decision-making. Although each of my theorists does not share this same level of commitment to equality in the subject positions, their work, on the whole, allows for the interpretation that we all may participate in the

⁹ In this respect, Creed’s work recalls Žižek’s (1992/2008) argument that monsters represent the fact that there is no self, only a void.

journey out of the torturous darkness into a more harmonious collective existence. This is the dimension of their work that I choose to embrace.

Plato's prisoners are chained in place and unable to move, and thus stare straight ahead at the wall of their subterranean prison. They devote their lives to talking about the shadowy images that appear on the cave wall, oblivious to the beautiful world that exists in the sunlit upper world. They are consumed by the shadowy images that they consume. As Lee (1955/1987) points out, the cave is like a primitive cinematic apparatus or television, and it thus reflects the passive, spectacular nature of democratic citizenship and politics (p. 316). Indeed, Debord's (n.d.) depiction of *The Society of the Spectacle* resembles Plato's cave scenario. For Debord, modern subjects passively accept whatever appears before them as good and true; the spectacle becomes their god.

With the cave, Plato represents the intellectual dysfunction of the mass. Plato's prisoners are man-machine hybrids, slaves who are plugged into a collective perception machine. They are victims/monsters that perceive their potential liberator (Socrates) as a monster, murdering him in order to defend their twisted perceptions of the truth.

Chapter 3 examines the monsters and cave scenario of *The Republic*. I synthesize Plato's political degeneration narrative, his monstrous model of the disordered psyche (the image of the beast and lion within the starving man), and his specific monsters (the drone, the prisoner, the democratic mass, and the wolf-man), presenting a comprehensive view of Platonic monstrosity within the context of future horrific visions. This chapter argues that Plato establishes a symbolic, causal and chronological framework that reflects and explains later constructions of monstrosity within the canon. As Alfred North Whitehead has famously stated, "the safest general characterization of the European

philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (1979, p. 39). I have found this to also be true in the case of monstrosity. As with so many other subjects in the Western tradition, Plato sets the stage for monstrosity.

Beginning with oligarchy, Plato introduces monstrous figures that appear as symptoms and reflections of societal degeneration: the predatory drone (oligarchy), the beastly mass (democracy), and the utterly degenerate wolf-man (tyranny). Plato’s monsters are the product of excess, as are monsters more generally (Poole, 2011). Monster talk thus provides a way for political theory to address excess – its causes, consequences, and various manifestations. Significantly, Plato’s metaphysics of monstrosity accounts for the nature and evolution of the various monstrous figures – from Hobbes’s productive man-machine to Romero’s cannibal consumer – examined in this dissertation.

The literature on Hobbes contains some excellent analyses of his monsters, which is unsurprising given that his work is exceptionally and obviously monstrous. As Robert Stillman discusses in “Hobbes’s *Leviathan*: Monsters, Metaphors, and Magic” (1995), Hobbes sees himself as fighting the monstrous metaphors of unscientific thought, and he conjures his own monsters to wage this rhetorical battle. Hobbes names two of his texts after biblical monstrosities, a phenomenon that Patricia Spingborg scrutinizes in “Hobbes’s biblical beasts: *Leviathan* and *Behemoth*” (1995), while he adorns the covers of *De Cive* and *Leviathan* with monstrous images – the former contains a depiction of human cannibalism and a stalking cat; the latter displays a giant sovereign who has ingested his subjects (Rossello, 2012, p. 266).

For his nightmarish depiction of humans in the state of nature, Hobbes was castigated by several of his contemporaries, and shortly after his death, Oxford, his alma mater, burned *Leviathan* (Rossello, 2012). In *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (1938/2008), Carl Schmitt traces the genealogy of leviathan through religious texts and cultural productions, and discusses the historical demonization of Hobbes and his great symbol of political unity. Hobbes is not only a monster-maker and a monster-slayer; for some, Hobbes himself is a monster.

Like Plato, Hobbes utilizes a horrific heuristic, his famously brutish natural state. The state of nature is a horrific parody of the traditional pastoral idyllic, a place devoid of culture where civilized humans transform into beastly predators (Stillman, 1995, p. 805). The natural state is of course where, as Hobbes puts it in the Epistle Dedicatory of *De Cive*, “Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe” (1998, p. 3), a restatement of the famous aphorism that first appears in *Asinaria*, a comic work by the Roman playwright Plautus (Plautus, 2006; Rossello, 2012, p. 255). As Henderson points out, Plautus’s aphorism has its roots in the ancient story of men transforming into wolves in Arcadia (Plautus, 2006), which is the same narrative to which Plato refers in his discussion of the tyrant in *The Republic* (565d). Unlike Plato, Hobbes does not attach the wolf-man to a specific political form, but to the absence of civil society.

Hobbes links this ancient myth of the wolf-man to the inhabitants of the New World. He does not specifically describe them as wolves, as George Washington will do,¹⁰ but in *Leviathan* Hobbes twice mentions that the savages of America dwell in the

¹⁰ “Attempting to drive them by force of arms out of our country,” Washington writes of the Indians “is like driving the wild beasts of ye forests...the gradual extension of our settlements will as certainly cause the savage, as the wolf, to retire; both being beasts of prey tho’ they differ in shape” (as cited in Rogin, 1987/1988, p. 46).

brutish natural condition, while the frontispiece of *De Cive* incorporates an image of the cannibal Indian (Rossello, 2012, p. 266). Within the European imagination, America was a land of cannibals, devil-worshippers, and hyper-sexualized beings (Rogin, 1987/1988, p.46; Poole, 2011, pp. 28-32; Wood, 1986/2003, p. 66). According to Poole (2011), *True History*, a sixteenth-century account of Brazilian cannibals, written by German soldier Hans Staden, “best illustrates this very common representation of the Americas” (p. 31). Staden

tells a tale of cannibalism that rivals anything a modern master of horror could conjure. One of the more infamous images from that work shows a gory cannibal feast that zombie auteur George Romero might have filmed.¹¹ A gaggle of cannibals roast human body parts over a fire... (p. 32)

Therefore in his attempts to inform his fellow citizens of their own monstrosity, Hobbes also participates in a popular form of monstrous projection upon the inhabitants of the New World. However, as I discuss in chapter 4, Hobbes is much more concerned with the monstrosity of his fellow Europeans than he is with that of foreign savages. Within his thinking, the latter functions as an example of what we all become in the state of nature.

Through his restatement of Plautus’s aphorism (1998, p. 3), Hobbes draws our attention once again to the wolf-man figure. How does this figure operate within his thinking? As Rossello (2012) points out, “scholars take this sentence...to illustrate the brutish, anarchical condition of man in the natural state” (p. 255). Schmitt, in a brief discussion of the wolf-man figure, notes that Hobbes does not hold a sanguine view of

¹¹ But whereas Staden uses cannibalism in order to represent the monstrous other, Romero uses it to represent the monstrosity of the self.

human nature (1938/2008, p. 36). Peter Gay makes a similar observation. Commenting upon Freud's use of "*Homo homini lupus*" in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Gay states that Hobbes and Freud share similarly pessimistic views of what motivates human behavior (Freud, 1989/1995, p. 749).

However, those political theorists who have given the most sustained attention to Hobbes's wolf-man – namely, Giorgio Agamben and Diego Rossello – challenge the common assertion that this figure simply reflects the predatory nature of the human. According to Agamben (1995/1998), "the life of the bandit is the life of the *loup garou*, the werewolf, who is precisely *neither man nor beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither" (p. 105). The bandit, like the werewolf, is a liminal figure who inhabits "a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture" (p. 109).

Agamben also links the wolf-man to the sovereign. In the "state of exception," which he compares to Hobbes's state of nature, the sovereign suspends the law in order to unleash bestly violence upon individuals. Agamben argues that the state of nature is not an historical epoch prior to the establishment of civil society, but an ever-present potential that manifests when the sovereign exercises the state of exception, thereby bypassing the law and embracing violence. The sovereign has not left the state of nature, but continues the violent ways of the beast within civil society. In this way, the wolf-man reveals the horrors of tyrannical sovereign violence.

Therefore, for Agamben, the wolf has two distinct but related meanings in Hobbes's thought. These two meanings correspond to the figures of the bandit (and the subject more generally within the state of exception), on the one hand, and the sovereign,

on the other. Both of these figures inhabit “a zone of indistinction...between man and beast, nature and culture” (1995/1998, p. 109). But whereas the sovereign wields the machinery of state power, the bandit stands outside of the protection of the law. Living outside of the state is dangerous but also potentially liberating. The bandit (or anyone in the state of exception) may become victimized or preyed upon by the beastly sovereign. But the life of the bandit also entails freedom from the law and state violence. Indeed, Robin Hood and his merry bandits absconded into the natural state of Sherwood Forest, on the outskirts of Nottingham, using their freedom in order to fight the beastly violence – or unjust use of the “state of exception,” to use Agamben’s phrase – of the Sherriff of Nottingham.

Rossello (2012) notes that there are several statements and images in Hobbes’s work – including the *Leviathan* frontispiece – that suggest that the sovereign demands civil slavery and preys upon the political subject. He interprets Hobbes’s wolf-man figure as a symbol of the indestructible desire for freedom from sovereign repression and predation. “Any unchecked irruption of the beast in man resembles the reemergence of the natural condition in the civil state, of liberty in subjection, and of passions in reason” (p. 273). Instead of interpreting the wolf-man as a symbol of our potential for beastly violence in the absence of the state, he reads it as a melancholic howl of those who suffer from tyrannical state violence and long for liberation.

Agamben’s (1995/1998) and Rossello’s (2012) critiques of Hobbes’s sovereign raise the question: What has the modern subject sacrificed in becoming the man-machine? In their readings, *Leviathan* and the wolf-man become symbols that reveal the psychic violence and disfigurements of modern subject formation. They suggest that the

true predator is Leviathan, that the wolf-man is perhaps more victim than monster, and that perhaps what Hobbes fears is freedom itself.

While Hobbes scholars have discussed the symbolic, historical and political dimensions of Leviathan and the wolf-man, no one has yet examined how Hobbes utilizes the subject positions of the horror genre – monster, victim, and hero – within his social contract theory. Furthermore, scholars have not compared Hobbes's monsters to other canonical monsters. In Chapter 4, I show how Hobbes deploys a hybridic methodology – a fusion of scientific experimentation and horrific fantasy – in order to construct his political theory. Viewing Hobbes's thought through the lens of the monster, I argue that he crafts not only a social contract theory, but also a modern horrific fairy tale in which a gigantic man-machine defeats the cannibal wolf-man in order to rescue human civilization.

Hobbes's vision of society as a gigantic mechanical apparatus anticipates the coming horrors of modern machine civilization, as seen in the critiques of mechanical enslavement found in Marx's factory and Arendt's camp. Both Marx and Arendt depict cannibal machines that produce living dead automatons. In Arendt's camp, the productive apparatus of modern civilization has degenerated into a sadistic yet banal killing machine that produces corpses instead of wealth. As predicted by Plato's narrative, we also see a corresponding change in the character types embraced by society. In 20th century fascist society, the oligarch has degenerated into the tyrant; Adolf Hitler is revealed as the rotten, tyrannical core of Ebenezer Scrooge, as the passion for destruction replaces the love of money.

Tocqueville differs quite noticeably from Plato and Hobbes in his conception of monstrosity. He does not utilize mythic monsters like the wolf-man or fantastical spaces like the cave and the state of nature, which is likely why Tocquevillian monstrosity has received almost no attention within the literature. However, Tocqueville is nonetheless one of the great theorists of modern monstrosity. He perceives a prison-like society that has been flattened and mechanized by equality, labor, materialism and consumerism, a land of the living dead in which apparent physical freedom is actually psychic tyranny.

Boesche (1980), and Avrimenko and Gingerich (2014), note that Tocqueville utilizes the penitentiary of Jacksonian America as a lens through which to grasp the nature of democratic tyranny. They argue that the extreme equality, isolation, surveillance, and slave labor of the prison showed Tocqueville the depths to which the American mass could sink. However, they do not compare Tocqueville's prison to Plato's cave, to Hobbes's state of nature, or to Romero's zombie apocalypse. They do not compare Tocqueville's prisoner to Plato's prisoner, to Hobbes's natural man (who is trapped within the "prisoner's dilemma"), or to the original mind-controlled zombie, which resembles Tocqueville's slavish, mechanical American laborer. Boesche notes that both the prison and American society in the 19th century function like a machine (p. 555), thus calling to mind, but not exploring, the man-machine figure. Furthermore, Boesche does not examine Tocqueville's dystopian critique of mechanical America in relation to Hobbes's utopian view of machine civilization and Romero's destruction of that civilization.

Tocquevillian monstrosity speaks to a society that destroys social distinctions and virally replicates sameness. As Manent (1996) points out, democratic personality is

based upon the figure of the double (p. 61). Democracy eliminates difference and attempts to create a world of universal self-reflection. Thus in America Tocqueville finds the mundane, generic mass, not the supernatural singularities of the European Gothic, like Dracula or the Wolf-Man. Hobbes's utopian vision of mechanical unity becomes, for Tocqueville, a dystopian nightmare of collective imprisonment and tyranny.

In Chapter 5 I argue that Tocqueville reveals the historical and psycho-political roots of what will become the Romero zombie. He shows us an incipient stage of American zombieism. His critique of the democratic mass – like Plato's – incorporates many of the essential features of Romero's zombie horde: identification with the animal within; an enervated psyche; intellectual deficiency; uncontrolled consumption; mass conformity; and political tyranny. However, Tocqueville emphasizes automaton slavery, not apocalyptic consumption. His notion of "intellectualized violence" as an invisible form of collective psychic control reflects the enslavement of the mind-controlled zombies of Hollywood cinema, including the automaton mass of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). His portrait of majority tyranny anticipates the work of theorists in the mid-twentieth century who critique the mechanical reproduction of a deadened self. Tocqueville foreshadows concepts like Fromm's "automaton conformity," Arendt's "social," Horkheimer and Adorno's "culture industry," and Marcuse's "one-dimensional man." He thus imagines the mechanical framework that Romero's zombies will tear asunder in the subsequent century.

Each of my monster theorists brings our attention to the beast within. When the beast is fed and indulged without the taming influence of reason, it takes control of the human personality, resulting in predatory behavior. Conversely, when the beast is denied

satisfaction, it rises to the surface of consciousness in violent outbursts (i.e., the Freudian return of the repressed). Tocqueville directs his critical energies, on the whole, towards the passive nature of mechanical existence in America. He worries that democratic citizens will become slavish mechanical brutes. However, Tocqueville is also “a moralist and theorist of the consumerist imaginary” (Jaume, 2008/2013, p. 84). As such, he provides a critique of the democratic desire for material goods, which he calls the “taste for material gratifications.” This taste is in conflict with the “love of money,” which drives the American machinery of production and accumulation.

The disciplined, hard-working Americans have managed to repress their non-economic desires for the most part, but this does not satiate their taste for physical pleasure through consumption. Tocqueville notes the presence of unruly beastly appetite lurking within the American soul. He witnesses a time in which the beast is beginning to tug at the chains of its mechanical imprisonment, the moment in Plato’s narrative when destructive “drone” desires begin to appear within the soul as a result of oligarchic self-repression. I thus argue that Tocqueville shows the conflict within the American between the man-machine, on the one hand, and the beastly consumer, on the other. He foreshadows the destructive consumption of Romero’s zombies.

Before the zombie renaissance, the literature on Romero was limited to discussions of *Night, Dawn and Day* within film studies (Dillard, 1973/1987; Heffernan, 2002; Hoberman and Rosenbaum, 1983/1991; Gagne, 1987; Grant, 1992; Shaviro, 1993; Waller, 1986/2010; Wood, 1986/2003). Following the successful release, in 2002, of the zombie films *28 Days Later* and *Resident Evil*, Romero began to receive much more attention, both inside and outside of film studies, as his creation became a monstrous

sensation. There are now several articles, chapters and books on Romero, many of which investigate the psychological, historical, political and sexual aspects of his zombies. Scholars have read his zombies through various lenses, including psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism, deconstructionism, and queer theory. But Romero has not yet been considered as a canonical monster theorist.

In chapter 6, I examine *Night's* apocalyptic narrative and zombie in relation to the monsters of Plato, Hobbes and Tocqueville. With this film Romero not only forever changes the landscape of American horror and monstrosity, but he also intervenes in the canonical interrogation of hidden human dysfunction. *Night* ruthlessly negates the standard monster narrative – in which knowledgeable and beneficent social authorities destroy an invasive other and reestablish the boundaries and norms of the social order – in order to reveal the monstrous nature of American society and subjectivity.

Romero's zombie apocalypse is reminiscent of Hobbes's state of nature. Romero screens Hobbes's worst forebodings about human nature, depicting humans devolving into a mass of isolated, a-social, predatory cannibals following the collapse of civilization. The anxious and fearful characters of *Night* hide in an empty farmhouse, waiting (in vain) for social authorities to explain the situation and come to their rescue. They spend the night fighting each other instead of cooperating, until, at the height of conflict, the zombies break through their makeshift defenses and claim the dwelling. At the end of the film a white posse – which is roaming the countryside in order to destroy the zombies and restore social order – kills Ben, the black protagonist. For both Hobbes and Romero, in the absence of government individuals become a-social predators who

attempt to band together into autonomous groups that uphold their own sense of what is right.

Whereas Hobbes attempts to prevent the state of nature by repressing the beast through mechanical containment, Romero celebrates the zombie apocalypse. Romero relishes releasing the beast from its cage, and using it to destroy the repressive norms and institutions of American society. *Night* conveys the idea that machine civilization will forever be haunted by lapses in containment, as subjects rebel or blindly thrash against the chains that bind them in the darkness of civil slavery. Hobbes's desire to replace an organic/animalistic form of hybrid monstrosity (the wolf-man) with a mechanistic one (the man-machine) is untenable for Romero. He thus presents an image of "America devouring itself" (Gagne, 1987, p. 38).

Romero utilizes the destruction of the zombie apocalypse in order to critique American society and subjectivity. The Romero zombie is a "critical materialist" (Maurizi, 2004), a figure that reveals the vast difference between the abstractions of American ideology (romantic love, family harmony, heroic political leadership, and freedom for all), on the one hand, and the realities of solipsism and predatory violence, on the other. According to Romero, "*Night of the Living Dead* is specifically saying that you're not talking to each other, electronic media doesn't work, people don't communicate...no one ever talks about anything; they just think they're right" (as cited in Engall, 2002, p. 158). I discuss how Romero's narrative reflects the distrust, racial tensions, family breakdown, and societal self-destruction of the late 1960s.

Whereas Tocqueville feared the enclosure of the democratic self within the economic and political machinery of American society, Romero celebrates the violent

destruction of this machinery. The Romero zombie is a broken-down automaton; a body that was once possessed by majority tyranny and disciplined into functioning as a tool of labor, but that is now re-animated by a monstrous hunger. It thus marks a transition in the nature of monstrous mass subjectivity, such that the robotic conformists of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* have become insatiable consumers.

Romero made this film at a moment of violent rupture between the older generation of the 1950s and the younger members of the 1960s counterculture. The “youth revolution” of the 1960s was “forged within the optimistic hedonism of the counterculture” (Phillips, 2005, p. 87). Its members “aspired to overturning the institutions of their parents’ society and forging something new, a culture founded on freedom, enjoyment, and love” (p. 87). The appearance of the young members of the 1960s counterculture – like the emergence of Plato’s oligarchic youth – represented a time of great civic unrest and revolution, as the non-economic desires of the beast asserted themselves within the mechanical framework enforced by the older generation.

Chapter 7 examines the evolution of the zombie, from its Haitian origins to the contemporary proliferation of the Romero zombie throughout American popular culture. It pays close attention to the subject positions and political themes of Romero’s zombie films, especially *Dawn* (1978), *Day* (1985) and *Land* (2005), showing how Romero increasingly portrays the zombie in a sympathetic light. I argue that in *Land* Romero completes his inversion of the monster genre by presenting zombies as revolutionaries who overthrow the political reign of predatory humans.

In earlier zombie films, zombies are prisoners of the will of their master. In Romero’s zombie films, humans are imprisoned within central institutions of American

society – a home in 1968; a shopping mall in 1978; a subterranean military bunker in 1985; an exclusive, fortified residence/shopping center for the wealthy in 2005; and digital media and the internet in 2007. These recurring images of imprisonment suggest that contemporary political subjectivity entails cognitive slumber, intellectual deficiency, and entrapment within dominant norms and institutions. They also connect to several of the images and themes found in Plato’s cave, Hobbes’s state of nature, Hobbes’s mechanical sovereign body, and Tocqueville’s penitentiary.

“In my films the villains are always the living,” Romero explains (as cited in Engall, 2005, p. 23). Romero’s villains are white American men in positions of institutional authority, such as the sadistic military officer Captain Rhodes of *Day*, and the wicked corporate executive/political tyrant Kaufman in *Land*, whom Romero based upon Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (Flint, 2009; Russell, 2005/2008). All of his heroic figures but one are black men or white women who advocate collective responsibility and shared decision-making. For Romero, America’s hope for the future lies in establishing a balanced relationship to the beast within, and in transcending racial, sexual, and economic inequality in society. We must claim the vitality of the beast, but also eliminate the various forms of appetitive tyranny – within self and society – that perpetuate violence, oppression and social fragmentation. Significantly, the primary function of Romero’s heroes is not to destroy monsters – in fact, the “extermination” of zombies is not heroic at all (Paffenroth, 2006, p. 48) – but to learn from them.

This chapter further argues that Plato’s degeneration narrative accounts for the evolution of the zombie. Whereas *Night* depicts the chaotic rupture of automaton conformity and enacts a return of the repressed within the late 1960s, *Dawn* embodies the

excessive American consumerism of the 1970s. Plato's blind, pleasure-seeking, democratic mass is on full display in the shopping mall of Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978).

As discussed by Plato, Tocqueville, and several members of the Frankfurt School, tyranny is the dark shadow of mass democracy. In *Day of the Dead*, Romero takes us into a subterranean military bunker, ruled by an irascible, fascistic military leader Captain Rhodes. Dr. Logan, whom the soldiers refer to as "Dr. Frankenstein," conducts experiments on zombies in an effort to domesticate them, giving them human flesh as a reward for being "good." In *Day* all that is left of American society is a sadistic and demented "military-scientific machine" (Shaviro, 1993, p. 94). This is what becomes of the beastly sovereign when it uncontrollably replicates states of exception, like a malfunctioning schizophrenic machine.

According to Robin Wood (1986/2003), *Day* is one of the most remarkable and audacious achievements of modern American cinema, and the most uncompromising critique of contemporary America (and, by extension, Western capitalist society in general) that is possible within the terms and conditions of a 'popular entertainment' medium. (p. 287)

Wood refers to *Day* as "the woman's nightmare" (1986/2003, p. 287). Indeed, while tormenting the zombies that they capture for Dr. Logan's experiments, Rhodes's soldiers utter sexist and threatening comments at Sarah, the female protagonist, who searches for a cure to zombieism and consistently advocates cooperation. Thus "*Day* confronted not only the false, manufactured optimism of its period but also the cinema's

reinstatement of masculinity as a central issue: the Rockys, the Rambos, the Chuck Norris and Schwarzenegger movies” (Wood, p. 288).

Interestingly, Agamben published *State of Exception* (2005) in the same year that Romero released *Land of the Dead* (2005). Agamben sees the state of exception proliferating throughout the world at the same time that the zombie is proliferating throughout popular culture and the narrative environments within which it appears. In *Land* we enter the dark and grotesque landscape of a society dominated by brutal exploitation and xenophobia. Kaufman is the CEO of Fiddler’s Green, an exclusive residence and shopping center for the wealthy. The wealthy lead lives of seclusion and pleasant consumption, while the poor, who inhabit a nearby shantytown, struggle to survive. Both Fiddler’s Green and the shantytown are located on an island, which separates the humans from the zombies, who live on the mainland in Uniontown.

Land represents Romero’s fullest development of the idea of zombie evolution. He begins to explore zombie subjectivity in *Dawn* by showing emotions on the faces of zombies, and by showing the audience the subjective viewpoint of the zombies (Bishop, 2010). In *Day*, he presents the first zombie character “Bub,” who relearns basic human skills, like how to salute and hold a gun (he was a soldier in his life). At the end of the film, Bub, gun in hand, pursues Captain Rhodes, as his fellow zombies devour the tyrant. In *Land*, Romero depicts political revolution as the ultimate culmination of zombie evolution. Under the leadership of the zombie “Big Daddy,” who “is like a zombified Black Panther, a civil rights revolutionary” (Russell, 2005/2008, p. 189), the zombies march upon the human island settlement. They tear down its electrified border fences, break into Fiddler’s Green, and eat the rich. Romero thus inverts the cannibalistic

dynamic of Marx's capital. He shows us that while we are alienated living dead monsters, monsters can also become revolutionary heroes.

In addition to the subject positions and political themes of Romero's zombie films, chapter 7 also discusses cannibalism, which is a topic that appears throughout the history of canonical monstrosity. The cannibal mass haunts the work of each of my theorists. For Plato, the cannibal wolf-man represents the monstrous core of each of the imperfect character types. For Hobbes, individuals in the natural state revert into the predatory cannibalism of the wolf-man. Tocqueville notes the presence of an insatiable beastly appetite within the American masses. And Romero imagines an orgiastic cannibal apocalypse.

Land presents an awesome inversion of elitist and racist narratives in which the people (either domestic revolutionaries or exotic foreigners) are depicted as a mass of cannibals that must be destroyed in order to save civilization. If the horror genre typically represents the cannibal as a monstrous other from outside of civil society (Brown, 2013), Romero reclaims the cannibalism that we have historically projected upon the other in order to devour the ideological and institutional framework of American power, which is the ultimate cannibal consumer and spectacular hypnotizer of the people.

Romero's depiction of cannibalism suggests that we must utilize the vital energies of the beast for the purposes of revolutionary transformation. While he opposes predatory human behavior, he also realizes that the lack of vitality within American society will inevitably result in spasms of violent destruction within self and society. Instead of attempting to repress these energies, he insists that we direct them, through the

use of a form of collective rationality, at the institutions that perpetuate slavery and oppression. Interestingly, Big Daddy shows no interest in eating human flesh.

Throughout the film this zombie leader, like Socrates, attempts to awaken his fellow zombies from their sensuous slumber, and to keep them focused upon collective transformation and political revolution.

Romero's zombie films thus recapitulate Plato's narrative within the context of contemporary American society, from the 1950s to the 2000s. *Night* enacts a return of the repressed within the white patriarchal power structure of the late 1960s. *Dawn* satirizes the excessive materialism and consumption of the American masses in the 1970s. *Day* reveals the horrific nature of the American military-scientific establishment in the 1980s. And *Land* depicts the savage inequalities and border mentality produced by the American corporate/governmental power structure in the 2000s. But whereas Plato leaves us in the darkness of sadistic tyranny, Romero offers a utopian vision of the tyrannized mass awakening and becoming a collective revolutionary protagonist.

Conclusion

While there are many monsters in the canon, very little has been written about them. Political theorists have discussed horror films and analyzed specific monsters from popular culture, but no one has undertaken a systematic examination of canonical monstrosity. This dissertation addresses this gap in the literature by dissecting and comparing the monsters of *The Republic*, *Leviathan*, *Democracy in America*, and Romero's zombie films.

My investigation into canonical monstrosity has shown that the gigantic cannibal machine, the sleeping prisoner, the productive mechanism, and the insatiable cannibal

mass are recurrent images within Western political theory. These monstrous figures reflect the fact that Western civilization is a monstrous cannibal that enslaves the minds and feeds upon the bodies of its subjects. Canonical monster theorists use the horror genre to reveal this disgusting truth, and to encourage us to transform our fragmented lives of solipsistic illusion and appetitive tyranny into a harmonious social formation.

How exactly do monster theorists carry out this revelatory work? Why and how is the monster a unique mechanism of vision? What is the horror narrative and how do political theorists utilize its conventions? These questions are addressed in the next chapter, which intervenes in discussions of monstrous ontology and epistemology.

Chapter 2—The Monster as an Epistemological Object

There are monsters on the prowl whose form changes with the history of knowledge.

-Michel Foucault

Introduction

How do you make visible the hidden dysfunctions, disgusting secrets and untapped potentials of self and society? “If philosophers are indeed enjoined to *know themselves*,” writes Richard Kearney, “they do well to continue concerning themselves with this inaugural and abiding enigma of the monster within” (2003, p.14). Several scholars note that the Latin *Monstrum*, from which “monster” is derived, means “revelation” and “warning” (Cohen, 1996; Gilmore, 2003; Poole, 2011). “The Latin *monstrum*,” writes Gilmore, “refers etymologically to that which reveals, that which warns, a glyph in search of a hierophant” (2003, p. 9). The monster is a coded revelation, a paradoxical and mysterious symbol, a story of our unknown selves. It speaks silently, symbolically: “Beware, you are not as you have imagined your self to be.” It haunts us with the truths that we ignore or repress, and brings to light our secret hungers and unspoken desires (Combe, 2011; Ingebretsen, 1996). In this chapter, I examine the epistemology of monstrosity, explaining why and how political theorists use the body and story of the monster in order to reveal the psychic violence, literal disfigurements and unseen forms of slavery that civilization inflicts upon its subjects, as well as to inspire us to undertake the heroic quest of self-examination and collective political transformation.

The Monster Narrative

As John Carpenter, director of the classic slasher film *Halloween* (1978), has noted, there are two types of horror narratives, one in which evil is located outside the light of the campfire, and the other in which evil is located within (Monument, 2009). Robin Wood also divides horror films into two types, depending upon their attitude towards the monster. He argues that we may develop “a rudimentary categorization of horror films in social/political terms, distinguishing the progressive from the reactionary, the criterion being the way in which the monster is presented and defined” (1986/2003, p. 69). For Wood, reactionary horror films view the monster as an evil other that must be destroyed, whereas progressive horror films – which are much rarer – take a more nuanced approach, examining the ways in which normality produces the monster.

Although my monster theorists do not easily fit into the contemporary political identifications of “progressive,” “conservative,” or “reactionary,” all of them tell a story about the monstrosity of the normal human self; each focuses the attention of the audience upon the evil that lurks within their respective camps. However, this is not the typical approach. Generally speaking, the makers of monsters – authors, directors, political rhetoricians – do not approach the monster in the spirit of critical self-examination. Instead, they view the monster as an invasive abnormal entity that must be destroyed in order to reaffirm the social order. This attitude is paradigmatically represented in Gothic scenes of angry villagers hunting an abnormal but sympathetic figure like Frankenstein’s monster.

The monster narrative is a ritual that humans have been repeating, with relatively little variation, from the earliest folkloric tales to contemporary horror films (Carroll,

1990, p. 97; Clover, 1992, p. 10; Creed, 1993, p. 5; Ingebretsen, 1998, 2001; Twitchell, 1985, p. 7). “Horror movies look like nothing so much as folktales – a set of fixed tale types that generate an endless stream of what are in effect variants: sequels, remakes, and rip-offs” (Clover, p. 10). “Through ritual,” explains Barbara Creed, “the demarcation lines between the human and non-human are drawn up anew and presumably made all the stronger for that process” (1993/1994, p. 8).

As Joseph Campbell has noted, the monster stories of peoples throughout the world, with remarkable consistency and ubiquity, unfold in the following narrative sequence: the monster appears from the dark; the human community becomes aware of its destructive predation and unites around the hero; the hero destroys the monster (Gilmore, 2003, p. 13). The story begins when the author alerts the reader to a monstrous presence. The monster directs its predatory instincts towards human society, damaging property, ending life, disrupting routines, dislodging norms of social interaction, and ultimately threatening to destroy civilization. That is, it reduces, or threatens to reduce, civil society to a primitive condition – like Hobbes’s state of nature – in which the rules and principles governing society are nullified or made inoperable. The narrative concludes when the hero destroys the monster and upholds human civilization.

The monster narrative unfolds within a specific conception of geographical space. Traditionally, the monster – in folklore, mythology, literature, film, and wherever else it may appear – dwells in spaces that are unknown, dangerous, and mysterious. It inhabits specific niches, areas or regions at or beyond the edges of the known and familiar world of the human characters, whether those edges are geographical or political (Gilmore, 2003, pp. 12-13). Locating the monster in circumscribed sites and foreign spaces sets it

apart from the rest of the narrative environment, which is human, and thus insulates normal humanity from abnormal monstrosity.

If we imagine a topographical map of the world that represents those areas inhabited by humans, on the one hand, and those in which monsters dwell, on the other, then in traditional narrative worlds we often find small islands of monstrosity surrounded by an ocean of humanity. The contours of this map are challenged or modified, to a greater or lesser extent, throughout the course of the narrative, as humans enter monstrous sites and monsters enter the world of humans; but they are habitually reinstated at the conclusion of the story. The containment of monstrosity – and the preservation of normal human-monster spatial relations – is guaranteed when, at the end of the film, the monster is destroyed; or, at the least, left within its localized region until the next film in the series, as seen, for example, in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), an otherwise transgressive film that repeatedly bludgeons its audience with intense terror and taboo-violation.

Generic convention dictates that social authorities destroy the monster – and thereby resolve the breach in civil society – in a showdown at the conclusion of the narrative. Normally, a heroic individual or small group destroys the monster through a display of ingenuity and strength. For example, Van Helsing, having learned of the fatal weakness of the vampire, slays Dracula with a stake through the heart, thereby saving Mina Harker and destroying the foreign pestilence that threatens the civilized inhabitants of London. Such an ending is synonymous with the classical monster narrative, and it is repeated in nearly every standard horror story prior to *Night*, as well as many that follow.

The expulsion of the monster is literalized at the end of the science-fiction horror film *Alien* (1979), as Ripley ejects the alien from the spaceship Nostromo. Other examples are plentiful: Beowulf destroys Grendel, reclaiming King Hrothgar's hall, Heorot, for its human inhabitants. Dr. Jeekyll kills himself when Mr. Hyde threatens to completely overtake his personality. A panther kills Irena at the end of *Cat People*, thus ensuring that citizens of New York City will no longer fall victim to her. U.S. soldiers in 50s cinema repeatedly destroy the monster – the alien-vegetable-man of *The Thing*, the prehistoric beast of *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), the giant ants of *Them!*, etc. – and thereby recapture their narrative environment. The slasher film of the 70s and 80s terminates with the destruction – albeit temporary – of the monster and the reinstatement of normal human-monster spatial relations. In *Ghostbusters* (1984), the heroes liquidate the evil Gozer's giant Stay Puft Marshmallow Man and save New York City, just as the giant alien parasite is revealed and destroyed at the end of *The Faculty* (1998), thereby returning possession of the local town to humanity.¹²

The linear sequence and spatial dynamics of the monster narrative participate in an epistemological process. “Horror stories,” writes Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror*, “are predominantly concerned with knowledge as a theme” (1990, p. 127). Pursuing the subject of “knowing the unknown” (p. 125), they are often based upon a “discovery plot,” a cognitive journey in which the audience follows characters as they discover the presence, cause and weakness of the monster (pp. 102-103). When we follow the hero into the lair of the monster, or behold the latter as it appears within civilization, we bear

¹² Of course, the monster is not always destroyed at the end of the film. At the end of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, for example, the murderous family of cannibals lives on. However, as noted above, the monstrous figures in this film, are nonetheless spatially contained within a specific area, and do not threaten to break free from that circumscribed space, and virally proliferate throughout the human world.

witness to an epistemological process that bridges known and unknown. When the monster is unthinkingly and gleefully terminated without pondering its relation to the human, an opportunity for valuable knowledge is lost. Although there may be cathartic release in certain instances of monstrous destruction,¹³ catharsis is not equivalent to knowledge formation. The typical monster narrative thus utilizes time and space in order to defend society against critical self-exposure.

The epistemological nature of the monster suggests that the ancient expulsion narrative should be inverted in the name of critical self-examination. This is precisely what canonical monster theorists do. Hobbes initially appears to be typical of the genre in that he concludes his social contract with the triumphant containment of the wolf-man by Leviathan. However, his hero is actually a monstrous hybrid, a mechanical cannibal that ingests its subjects, and thus he does not really offer us the narrative closure that he desires. His monsters do profound revelatory work because they resist standard narrative closure and refuse incorporation within known categories of classification.¹⁴

Plato, Tocqueville and Romero do not expel the monster. Instead, they depict horrific images of the present and leave us with dark forebodings about the future. Plato concludes his narrative with the horrors of tyranny, not the triumph of Athenian social authorities. However, he does note the possibility of a harmonious society ruled by philosophers, a heroic victory that is achieved through the examination and overcoming of the monstrosity of self and society. Indeed, Plato, like Romero, does not reject the

¹³ Kendall Phillips (2005) argues that the ending of *Night* is not one of those instances. In this film, the viewer is left in a state of shock and terror, not cathartic release. It is probably the case that catharsis, as an explanatory category within reception theory, has been over-stated in other instances as well.

¹⁴ In the world of monstrosity, like the world of theory, it is better to openly present contradictions, rather than to attempt to hide them. Hobbes makes great efforts to contain contradictions, but his work, like the body of Frankenstein's monster, contains several visible stitches, where he has sutured disparate parts together.

need to heroically transcend monstrosity, but he does have a different conception of heroism than what is typically found in the horror genre. For both Plato and Romero, self-examination, exploration of one's own otherness – not hostility towards the other – is an essential attribute of the hero.

At the end of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville leaves his audience with a “nightmare vision” of “human life reduced to inertia” (Kaledin, 2011, p. 355): a land of the living dead in which a vast bureaucratic apparatus rules over a mass of somnambulistic brutes. Although he does suggest that a democratic elite may help to counter materialism and tyranny, he does not offer a focused vision of the hero, as we find in Plato and Romero.

Like his predecessors, Romero upends the narrative and symbolic structures of the traditional monster genre. In his zombie apocalypse, social authorities do not destroy an abnormal other or an alien invader. Instead, human society disintegrates under the pressure of its own living death, as his heroic characters humbly realize the intimate relationship between human and zombie. Romero concludes his films with zombie chaos, not containment. Instead of re-instating normal human-monster relations, he concludes with tyrannical figures being eaten alive by zombies, as the last vestiges of a repressive social order are destroyed. In fact, *Land* completely reverses the standard monster narrative by concluding with a successful zombie revolution. This is perhaps one of the most radical examples of sympathy for the monster that has ever been depicted on film.

Although Plato, Hobbes and Tocqueville do not refuse containment with the same intensity as Romero does in his zombie apocalypse, they do, to varying degrees indicate

the presence of an inner monstrosity that has the potential to explode into mass apocalyptic cannibalism. Given that their audiences inhabit a monstrous form of civilization, these theorists refuse the easy comforts that come from depicting the triumph of the existing social order (with the partial exception of Hobbes.)

The zombie apocalypse narrative is exceptional in light of the history of the horror genre, for it inverts and demolishes the construction of the monster as an abnormal other that must be expelled. In fact, the zombie renaissance speaks to a time in which the social order appears to be no longer capable of containing its monstrous truths. In the 1950s monster film, military men saved the day by destroying mutated bugs, giant creatures and alien invaders. Today, the Pentagon, which has developed a plan to counter the zombie apocalypse (Lubold, 2014), has felt compelled to step into the role that was traditionally left to its filmic representatives. But no amount of bullets, bombs or reinforced borders can defeat the monster; it can only be conquered when the hero solves its riddle.

The Monstrous Space

The spatial mapping of monstrosity participates in the externalization of our unknown otherness. One may interpret foreign lands and exotic spaces within horror films as screens upon which the inner monstrosity of the audience is projected (Wood, 1986/2003, p. 77).¹⁵ In other words, fantastical monstrous spaces are externalizations of internal psychic aspects of the self. Monstrous space reveals the otherwise invisible processes of political subjection, as well as, in certain instances, utopian visions of the

¹⁵ “The foreignness of horror in the 30s can be interpreted in two ways: simply, as a means of disavowal (horror exists, but is un-American) and, more interestingly and unconsciously, as a means of locating horror as a ‘country of the mind,’ as a psychological state” (Wood, 1986/2003, p. 77).

future. This dissertation approaches Plato's cave, Hobbes's state of nature, Tocqueville's penitentiary, and Romero's zombie apocalypse from this perspective.

"History's dark places" (Poole, 2011, p. xv) clearly display the horrors of normal human existence. Arendt (1948/1976) saw the camp in these terms. "It was as if the victims of the camps experienced a death in life only slightly more toxic than the one they already suffered outside the camps" (Robin, 2004, p. 106). The camp continues to have relevance as a horrific heuristic. Agamben argues that we should "regard the camp not as a historical fact and an anomaly belonging to the past...but in some way as the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living" (1995/1998, p. 166). In other words, the camp shows us the unacknowledged horrors of our daily lives.

Arendt refers to the prisoners in the camp as "the living dead" (Arendt, 1948/1976, p. 441), which suggests that there is a connection between the camp prisoners and the zombie. Indeed, "Romero's zombies recognize their provenance, not in the quaint pages of fiction, but in the historical actuality of Auschwitz" (Maurizi, 2004, Horror as Historical Concreteness section, para. 3). The machinery in Arendt's camp – like the "military-scientific machine" of American society in Romero's zombie films (Shaviro, 1993, p. 92) – is devoted to "the mass production of corpses" (Arendt, p. 441). Post-Auschwitz, "the ongoing massification and the growing impotence of individuals are reducing the category of the Subject to philosophical junk" (Maurizi, Decomposing the Subject section, para. 2). In the 1950s, Americans attempted to repress the fact that they inhabited a form of dead, empty, meaningless subjectivity by embracing the productive, accumulating life of the man-machine. *Night* traumatized audiences with the

reality of their living death, depicting walking cannibal corpses instead of the rubber monsters and metallic robots typically found in sanitized monster movies of the time.

Arendt's camp, like Plato's cave and Romero's zombie apocalypse, has an "atmosphere of madness and unreality" (Arendt, 1948/1976, p. 445). She argues that the camp prisoners are subjected to a "skillfully manufactured unreality" (p. 445). Romero will make a similar point about the American citizen throughout his zombie films, beginning with his critical depiction of the television – which conveys distorted, unhelpful information – in *Night*. According to Romero, *Night* conveys the idea that "electronic media doesn't work" (as cited in Engall, 2002, p. 158). *Diary* (2007) specifically focuses upon the deadening impact of the media in the internet age.

One finds a similar use of monstrosity within the work of Marx. Marx's factory reveals the horrific nature of capitalist society. In order to survive, workers are forced to become the "living appendage" of

a mechanical monster whose body fills whole factories, and whose demon power, at first veiled under the slow and measured motions of his giant limbs, at length breaks out into the fast and furious whirl of his countless working organs.

(1967/1992, pp. 360-361)

Like Hobbes's Leviathan, Marx's factory is a gigantic cannibal man-machine. The mechanical monstrosity of the factory assembles itself out of the bodies of its various human subjects. But whereas the cannibalistic nature of the giant man-machine was implicit in Hobbes's work, Marx makes it explicit by depicting capital as a mechanical vampire that devours its living dead slaves.

According to Maurizi (2004), Romero “unconsciously” conveys Engels’ dictum “capitalism is institutionalized cannibalism” (Mortuary Objectivity section, para. 1). This is true, but not specific enough. Cannibalism does not only function as a critique of capitalism within Romero’s work. Chapter 7 discusses how Romero utilizes cannibalism to highlight the exceptionally predatory nature of certain figures and institutions, to represent human intraspecies predation more generally, as well as to envision the revolutionary overthrow of existing power relations so that a new world may be born. In respect to this third function, *Land* reverses the cannibalistic dynamic of Marx’s factory by showing cannibalized slaves eating the rich and overthrowing corporate tyranny.

In the monstrous space we thus see a method of symptomology/monstrosity, in which a site of intense dysfunction and violence reveals a more general truth of society and subjectivity. Indeed, Plato, Tocqueville, Marx, and Arendt each deploy a method whereby a characteristic and monstrous institution (the cave, the prison, the factory, and the camp, respectively) reveals the larger horrific truth of society: we are living dead slaves of a monstrous mechanical apparatus.

Monster, Self, Other

Although people often associate the monster with the other, for, like the other, it is “difference made flesh, come to dwell among us” (Cohen, 1996, p. 7), the monster is, in reality, a representation of our own otherness, a manifestation of that which we do not know about the self, but should take note of. Scholars working within a variety of disciplines and theoretical perspectives confirm this interpretation. Žižek, as we have seen, argues, “*the monster is the subject himself, conceived as Thing*” (1992/2008, p. 157). For Cohen, “the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond – of all

those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within” (1996, p. 7). Thus “audiences taking in a monster story aren’t horrified by the creature’s otherness, but by its uncanny resemblance to ourselves” (Newitz, 2006, p. 2). According to anthropologist David Gilmore, “the monster of the mind is always the familiar self disguised as the alien Other” (2003, p. 16). Edward Ingebretsen makes a similar observation: “Although monsters may be coded as foreign or outlandish, rarely are they alien. They are us, our failed selves,” “the image and likeness in which humanity is made” (1998, *Monster-Making: Civics 101* section, para. 6, 23). Their hunger – often for human flesh – is our hunger (Ingebretsen, 1998); their violent predation reflects our “aggression and sexual sadism” (Gilmore, 2003, p. 4). In other words, the dark and troublesome aspects of our selves are transmogrified into the beasts of popular culture (Combe, 2011).

Although scholars interpret the meaning of the monster through several different lenses, their descriptions of its epistemological function tend to converge upon the notion that the monster is an externalization of the unfathomed and troublesome unknown within. Summarizing the monster literature, Gilmore argues, “for most Western observers the monster is a metaphor for all that must be repudiated by the human spirit” (2003, p. 12). Indeed, much of the monster and zombie literature assumes a similar perspective: the monster appears so that we may learn from it and make necessary changes in our lives and social systems.

How is it that the monster performs this epistemological feat? Social order depends upon and reproduces epistemic stability. That is, it tends to perpetuate an unchanging representation of what is real and true, on the one hand, and what is unreal

and false, on the other. This stability generates a dominant worldview that often ignores unpleasant truths, and that helps to perpetuate relations of domination and oppression. As historian Scott W. Poole argues in *Monsters in America* (2011), “master narratives are, by definition, lies and untruths” (p. xv). The stories of the master – the slave owner, the patriarch, the elite corporate executive – enforce partial or distorted epistemic frames at the expense of others, and thereby perpetuate untruth, inequality, and oppression. Maurizi similarly argues that contemporary American society is “designed” so as to “exorcise” the horror that it produces, thus preventing individuals from realizing the “disgusting” truths at the root of personal and social problems (Maurizi, 2004, Meeting Necessities section, para. 5).

In *Skin Shows*, Halberstam notes that “horror works hard at dismantling the stable relations between representation and reality” (1995, p. 144). In this respect, horror and political theory are similar, for political theorists since Plato have been concerned with dismantling and reassembling the worldviews of their audiences in order to show them horrific truths that permeate their daily lives but remain unexamined within the common frame. “Horror has always played this eccentric role inside the culture industry: its negativity brings to expression the vague and yet insuppressible instinct for truth from an audience perpetually filled with lies by media” (Maurizi, 2004, Meeting Necessities section, para. 4). Discussing Romero’s “hyperrealist” style, Maurizi writes, “it questions the limits of filmic fiction, forcing a lying image to tell a disgusting truth” (Horror as Historical Concreteness section, para. 3). In Romero’s zombie films “masochistic thrills” become “an access into the real beyond capitalist deception” (Maurizi, Meeting Necessities section, para. 4).

The monster explodes society's reified epistemic framework. "'Monsters' ...signal borderline experiences of uncontainable excess, reminding the ego that it is never wholly sovereign" (Kearney, 2003, p. 3). "By a monster," writes Joseph Campbell, "I mean some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all of your standards for harmony, order and ethical conduct (1968, p. 222; as cited in Gilmore, 2003, p. 6). Monstrous beings disrupt the symbolic order and reign over a liminal time period in which the rules of society – and the norms associated with being human – are suspended or abandoned, thus allowing us to open up to new sensations, desires, and ideas. The monster is a product of fancy, but its fantastical flight from reality serves the epistemological function of breaking through naturalized or reified notions of truth and reality.

The monster is a unique mechanism of vision that allows us to see unknown and ignored aspects of social and historical truth. "We need to study monsters" because "they are the things hiding in history's dark places, the silences that scream if you listen closely enough" (Poole, 2011, p. xv). Indeed, "gloopy zombies and entrail-covered serial killers," writes Newitz, "are allegorical figures of the modern age, acting out with their broken bodies and minds the conflicts that rip our social fabric apart" (2006, p. 1). Monsters alert us to the presence of knowledge that has been repressed, ignored or forgotten. The unreality of the monster thus marks its distance from official and accepted views of the human self, and its proximity to unfathomed truths.

Approaching the Monster

Monsters are the product of the particular historical and cultural context within which they appear. As a result, the appearance and meaning of monsters will change

over time and across cultural space. “Different groups will represent the monstrous in different ways,” notes Mark Jancovich, “and representations will develop historically” (1994, p. 8; as cited in Schneider, 2006, p. 168). Similarly, Halberstam (1995) explains, “the body that scares and appalls changes over time, as do the individual characteristics that add up to monstrosity, as do the preferred interpretations of monstrosity” (p. 9). Therefore “monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them (Cohen, 1996, p. 5). I follow this methodological principle by discussing monsters in relation to the historical moments in which they were created. For example, I discuss Hobbes’s *Leviathan* in relation to the English civil wars and analyze the zombies of *Night* against the backdrop of the civic unrest of the late 1960s.

Several scholars emphasize that the monster contains a multiplicity of meanings. According to Halberstam (1995), the body of the monster “is a machine that...produces meaning and can represent any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative” (p. 21). Žižek (1992/2008) similarly argues that the attempt to find a singular meaning in the monster is “marked by a brand of ultimate arbitrariness” (p. 152). Given the amorphous meaning of the monster, some scholars even refuse to provide a definition. “Monsters have been manufacturing complex meanings for four hundred years of American history. They do not mean one thing but a thousand,” claims Poole (2011, p. xiv). “So do not expect neat definitions when it comes to a messy subject like monsters,” he warns (p. xiv). Gilmore (2003) similarly cautions us to approach monsters “carefully” (p. 22).

“The monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization” (Cohen, 1996, p. 6). Therefore “monstrous interpretation...must content itself with fragments

(footprints, bones, talismans, teeth, shadows, obscured glimpses – signifiers of monstrous passing that stand in for the monstrous body itself” (p. 6). The monster is thus, in part, a mystery that will remain unsolved. It is a dense site of symbolic and affective activity, a complex fusion of known and unknown elements of self and world, one that simultaneously attracts us through desire, repulses us through fear, and confounds us through complexity.

While scholars like Halberstam, Cohen, and Poole emphasize the particularities, complex amorphousness, and ever-changing meanings of monsters, I argue that there are indeed universal psychological and political aspects of monstrosity. The attributes, meanings, and interpretations of the monster change over time and place, but they also remain the same – remarkably so in certain respects. As discussed in chapter 1, specific monstrous figures recur throughout the canon, including the cannibal machine, the prisoner, the automaton/man-machine, and the cannibal mass. Furthermore, these recurring figures arise, pass away, and change from one to the other (from organism to mechanism and vice versa) according to certain underlying metaphysical principles, such as Plato’s notion that excess in one polarity of a conceptual binary results in an explosion of excess into the opposite polarity (e.g., excessive self-control eventually explodes into excessive uncontrol).

What, then, does the monster mean? As a way into this question, consider Žižek’s (1992/2008) discussion of the genre’s first summer blockbuster, Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975). Žižek argues that “the killer shark in *Jaws* can signify anything from repressed sexuality to unbridled capitalism and the threat of the Third World to America” (p. 152). Instead of seeking a singular correct interpretation one should

“conceive the monster as a kind of fantasy screen where this very multiplicity of meanings can appear and fight for hegemony” (pp. 152-153). Fredric Jameson makes the same point: “the vocation of the symbol – the killer shark – lies less in any single message or meaning than in its very capacity to absorb and organize all of these quite distinct anxieties together” (1990, p. 26; as cited in Žižek, 1992/2008, p. 153). This view of the shark is very much in line with the methodological perspective advanced by Cohen, Halberstam, and Poole, among others, so it will effectively serve the purpose of evaluating monster method.

The monster does not admit of as much variation or complexity as these scholars believe. Comparing a scene in *Jaws* in which the character Quint is attacked by the killer shark to an image on a German woodcut from the early 1800s, Gilmore notes that these are “almost identical scenes, imagined more than one hundred years apart” (p. 178). In both works “artists have focused upon the central image of the oversized mouth of the attacking creature arising from the depths and dwarfing the defenseless human victim (p. 178). “Monsters are always ‘Big Mouths’” (Gilmore, 2003, p. 178). Indeed, from the cavernous maw of the Biblical whale that swallows Jonah to the giant metallic mouth of the industrial factory in Frit Lang’s *Metropolis* (1922) to the devouring orifice of the *Jurassic Park* (1993) dinosaurs, the horror genre places “continual visual emphasis on the colossal mouth as organ of predation and destruction” (p. 176). The killer shark in *Jaws* is essentially the same giant consuming mouth that has been haunting the nightmares of humanity since monsters began appearing along with self-consciousness and literacy (Gilmore, 2003). And while the mouths of humanoid monsters like the werewolf, the vampire, and the zombie are not colossal, they are nonetheless the deadly weapons of

predation with which they consume their human victims. Furthermore, we may consider zombies – which constitute a “total zombie organism” (Mohammad, 2010, p. 97) – to be a singular hive or swarm monstrosity that devours humanity wherever it appears. As a representation of the threat of oral predation, the monster has been quite stable in its meaning over time.

Žižek, in his rush to embrace intellectual sophistication, overlooks the most obvious interpretation of the monstrous creature of *Jaws*: The shark is just a shark. It need not represent anything else. The monster is a representation of threat (Asma, 2009; Carroll, 1991), and humans have felt threatened by real predatory animals for a long time (Asma, 2009; Gilmore, 2003). When audiences watch a killer shark movie, they fear the shark because it is essentially a set of razor-sharp teeth attached to a giant muscle that moves rapidly and often imperceptibly through unknown waters. Our phobic responses to images of predatory beasts within horror films might actually be hard-wired into our brains, the biological remnant of a time when similar creatures hunted our ancestors (Asma, 2009). The thrill of the killer animal movie comes from the visceral experience of being reconnected to our instincts (to the reptilian brain, or brain stem, that primitive part of our brains responsible for responding to danger through either “flight or fight” responses.). People turn to horror movies because they want to be scared. They seek out the visceral impact of primitive fear in order to escape from the dull and boring existence of “cybernetic man,” and for the thrill of being reminded that an animal dwells within their civilized exterior. Žižek thus fails to consider that the shark is thrilling precisely because it has no meaning; that it primarily functions to provoke a primitive fear of being

consumed. Neither the Third World, nor capitalism, nor one's libido is swimming in the waters of *Jaws*; a shark is.

Of course, this point should not be taken too far. Audiences, filmmakers and theorists layer meanings on top of basic instinct. What might the shark mean on top of or in addition to its basic function as a representation of primitive threat? Notice that Žižek does not say that the shark can mean anything, but that it can mean a specific set of things, three to be exact: “repressed sexuality,” “unbridled capitalism” and “the threat of the Third World to America” (p. 152). In each case, the nature of the (perceived) threat – the three possible meanings – must correspond to the threat that the shark poses. In other words, we are essentially dealing with the predator-prey relationship. For Žižek, the killer shark may provoke anxieties in the mind of the viewer that are related to the beast within (appetite), the beast without (predatory capitalism), or the beast abroad (a foreign people or region), or perhaps some mixture of these three meanings. Žižek believes that he is proposing three different meanings, but, in actuality, he is proposing one meaning in three different locations.

While Hobbes will, at times, depict the other as a monster (e.g., the savage of America), he, like the other theorists examined in this dissertation, emphasizes the first two meanings. Indeed, canonical monster theorists repeatedly attempt to focus our attention upon the big societal mouth that is devouring us as we prey upon each other in the darkness of illusion and uncontrolled appetite.

It is important to note that certain monsters are more complex or full of possible meanings than others. Hobbes's leviathan is one such example. However, we should not allow historical specificities, and layers of possible meaning, obscure the fact that the

monster, in a very important respect, is quite simple and direct in its function as the gapping maw. Furthermore, the complex monstrous object can be addressed like any other analytic object, by breaking it down into its various subcomponents, and then tracing the lines of meaning connected to those more basic elements. This is what I attempt to do with Leviathan in chapter 4. Therefore while the monster may be a meaning machine (Halberstam, 1995), it does not produce random or endless meanings. The meanings that the monster produces are limited by, and must ultimately refer back to, the specific cultural and historical details that produced it. Of course, one might attach any random meaning to a monster (as one might do with any other object), but there is a difference between subjective delusion and objective meaning. The monster is an historical object, and as such, it is a product of the objective historical processes that it reflects. Furthermore, the historical variations and unique details of different monsters manifest within a general pattern or framework of monstrosity, which includes the presence of a devouring mouth.

Finally, there is a crucial difference between the shark and a humanoid monster like the zombie. While both of these figures are representations of the devouring mouth, they also are representations of two different species. The zombie is situated within the intimate spaces of daily human existence (the home, the mall, etc.), whereas the shark swims in the ocean. The zombie is a critical representation of human dysfunction, whereas the shark is a representation of literal, primitive threat. The shark might take on a social or political significance for audiences and/or for theorists, but we should not lose sight of its most basic significance as a predatory animal. Furthermore, whereas the image of the shark is more or less equivalent to a real shark, the image of the zombie is

quite uncanny; its rotting corpse, lack of self-awareness and cannibalism symbolize a differential between the normal image of the human (what we know or believe the human to be) and the monstrous image of the human (what we do not know about the human). While we can force the shark to tell us things about ourselves, injecting meaning from our human lives into its non-human habitat and behavior, the zombie forces us to read it in terms of our self for it literally is our (unknown) self.

The Symbolic Structures of Monstrosity

The monster appears in many shapes and forms, but it is most often a hybrid like the wolf-man or the man-machine. Indeed, monster scholars often note the hybridic, liminal or interstitial nature of the monstrous body. Cohen describes monsters as “disturbing hybrids” (1996, p. 6), while Gilmore argues that “hybridization...remains a critical element in all analyses, demanding special attention” (2003, p. 7).

In *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), Carroll writes, “the fantastic biologies of horrific monsters are, to a surprising extent, reducible to the symbolic structures of fusion and fission” (p. 47). “A fusion figure,” Carroll explains, “is a composite that unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in *unambiguously* one, spatio-temporally discrete entity” (p. 43). For example, the zombie is a human body driven by the hunger of a monstrous predatory beast; it is also both living and dead.¹⁶ That is, it fuses the categories of human and beast, and life and

¹⁶ Greek mythology contains several well-known examples of hybridization or fusion, including human-animal hybrids like the centaur (the head and torso of a man attached to the body of a horse), the minotaur (the head of a bull attached to the body of a man), the satyr (a human with parts from a goat), and the harpy (the head of a woman attached to the body of a bird). The Sphinx – the body of a lion, the wings of a large bird and the head of a woman – is a more complex version of the hybrid. The Manticore of Persian mythology is even more complex. It is based upon the body of a red lion and the head of a man, but it also incorporates aspects of other animals, such as large shark-like teeth, wings, horns, and/or the tail of either a dragon or a scorpion.

death, in the same body. “With fission, the contradictory elements are, so to speak, distributed over *different*, though metaphysically related, identities” (p. 46). Carroll lists the werewolf, the doppelganger, and the alter-ego as examples of the fission figure (p. 46). Fission may be created temporally through shape-shifting (e.g., the werewolf), or spatially through doubling/multiplication (e.g., the doppelganger).¹⁷

Monstrous fusion and fission both represent inner conflict or self-division. The former reveals the excessive presence of something (beastly appetite or mechanical behavior) by joining disparate parts into a singular being. Fission achieves the same effect, but it does so by showing the individual shifting into and out of excessive versions of those same components (e.g., the repressed man-machine transforms into the violent werewolf).

As Plato demonstrates in his three-part monstrous model of the psyche (beastly appetite, untamed spirit, and starving reason), in the typical person the psychic faculties are at war with each other. The controlled mechanism and the destructive consumer represent different forms and/or historical stages of inner psychic conflict. In cannibal monsters like the zombie, the beastly impulses have destroyed the intellectual, social and spiritual capacities of the human.¹⁸ The zombie condition is one in which the human self is completely identified with the unceasing pursuit of cannibalistic consumption and societal destruction. Figures in the tradition of the automaton or man-machine – such as

¹⁷ According to Carroll (1990), magnification, massification, and horrific metonymy are the other popular symbolic structures of monstrosity. The first two “are means for augmenting the powers of already disgusting and phobic creatures” (p. 52), while “horrific metonymy is a means of emphasizing the impure and disgusting nature of the creature—from the outside, so to speak—by associating said being with objects and entities that are already reviled” (p. 52).

¹⁸ However, this is not always true. Sometimes these figures are used to sympathetically portray persecuted or misunderstood individuals or groups. For example, although the zombies in *Warm Bodies* (2013) at first eat living humans, they learn to forgo such behavior and develop loving relationships with humans by the end of the narrative.

the robot women in *The Stepford Wives* – portray a different sort of inner conflict, one in which mechanical psychological and social processes have nullified the vitality, creativity and independence of the individual. Both tendencies – robotic servitude and destructive consumption – are always present to some degree, but individuals and societies move closer to one or the other form of inner conflict over time. While the 1950s was a time of “automaton conformity” (Fromm 1941/1969, p. 183), the 2000s was a period in which horror was dominated by the cannibal zombie, the psycho-killer, and films like *Saw* (2004) and *Hostel* (2005), which critics have classified as “torture porn.” Thus society itself is like a schizophrenic divided self, a werewolf that shifts back and forth between mechanical repression and beastly violence. The shape of historical knowledge reflects these transformations.

Monsters contradict the epistemic schematic of society. The monstrous body is an affront to existing categories of knowledge. Monsters refuse “to participate in the classificatory ‘order of things’” (Cohen, 1996, p. 6). Their “externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” (p. 6). As “the harbinger of category crisis” (p. 6), the monster challenges the distinctions between normality and abnormality, self and other, animal and human, life and death. Monsters thus signify a divided self and an incomplete self-knowledge. As an embodiment of unresolved (ontological and epistemological) contradiction, the monster asks us to consider the contradictions within our selves, our social system, and our knowledge. In the case of the zombie, for instance, we are asked to solve the riddle of living death, which I address in chapters 6 and 7.

Relating to the Beast

When political theorists call upon the monster they generally do not explain why they do so or how the monster functions within their thinking. For the most part, even the most critical and self-reflective monster theorists like Plato and Romero do not spell out the rhetorical and epistemological functions of the monster, but simply allow it to “speak for itself” at the level of image, symbol and myth.

Machiavelli is a significant exception. In *The Prince*, he discusses how authors in the ancient world represented Chiron, the centaur, as the instructor of political leaders like Achilles. “All the allegory means, in making the teacher half beast and half man, is that the prince must know how to act according to the nature of both, and that he cannot survive otherwise,” Machiavelli explains (1961/1986, p. 99). The “prince must understand how to make a nice use of the beast and the man” (p. 99). More specifically, he must be able to be cunning like the fox and ferocious like the lion. The leader should make the beast into a political resource in a world of deception and brutality in order to survive the onslaughts of *fortuna*, a force that constantly threatens to upset one’s strategies and erode one’s fortifications.

Machiavelli’s discussion of Chiron touches upon three related but distinct monstrous themes: epistemological revelation, ontological constitution (specifically hybridism), and practical transformation. In the first respect, the monster is a specific mechanism of vision that enables us to make out new intellectual configurations within the darkness of the unknown, and to bring those unknown phantasms within the light of the known. While monsters often show us conflicts and dysfunctions that must be addressed, they also can reveal positive or liberating potentials as well. Chiron

demonstrates skills that the prince must develop or add to his personality in order to survive.

Second, the monster is often used to represent a region, faculty or constellation of forces within the self. The hybridic nature of Chiron – half-man and half-beast – embodies two different dimensions of the human being. The presence of animal body parts fused into the human form specifically draws our attention to the beast-in-man. Machiavelli, like Plato, addresses the issue of how the political actor should relate to beastly impulses within the self. When commentators speak of the “monster within,” especially those working in the psychoanalytic tradition, they often have a similar idea in mind. For instance, Wilhelm Reich (1970/1996) argues that “liberalism lays stress upon its ethics for the purpose of holding in suppression the ‘monster in man,’ our layer of ‘secondary drives,’ the Freudian ‘unconscious’” (Reich, 1970/1995, p. xii).

Third, the monster brings forth new knowledge that pertains not only to the theme of ontology, but also to that of practical action. The monster shows us what we need to know in order to change, survive or transform. Chiron brings to light the art of effective political leadership. Thus we can see in Machiavelli’s use of Chiron that the monster has a revelatory, an ontological and a practical significance.

In respect to the practical dimension of monstrosity, Locke makes an argument that is reminiscent of Machiavelli’s claim. Locke does not state that the individual must know how to act like the beast, but he does appeal to the survival instinct in order to justify violent behavior when one is under threat in the state of war. He argues that “one may destroy a man who makes war upon him, or has discovered an enmity to his being, for the same reason that he may kill a wolf or a lion” (1946/2002, p. 8). Those who use

“force and violence,” and who “are not under the ties of the common law of reason” are “dangerous and noxious creatures” and thus “may be treated as beasts of prey” (1946/2002, p. 8). However, instead of justifying the use of the beast by the sovereign, Locke, like Hobbes, seeks to avoid the beastly inconveniences of the state of nature through a specific conception of government.

In Hobbes’s famous phrase, the life of those who behave like beasts is “nasty, poor, brutish, and short” (1962/1966, p. 99). Like Locke, Hobbes believes that those who place themselves outside of the laws of reason enter into the world of the beast, but he is much more pessimistic than Locke about the ability of individuals to peacefully cohabitate in the natural state. In Hobbes’s state of nature, Locke’s “dangerous and noxious creatures” are the norm. Due to the “prisoner’s dilemma,” it is very difficult for individuals to cooperate or participate in any form of sociality, for there is no universal enforcement mechanism to ensure the mutual fulfillment of contracts. Everyone is forced into a condition in which they are simultaneously predatory beasts and relatively helpless victims. Hobbes thus seeks to escape from the beast, not to use it wisely.

Plato is more nuanced than Hobbes on the topic of how one should relate to the beast. Unlike Machiavelli, Plato does not state that the ruler must know how to make a good use of it. But Plato does argue that we must tame and make a friend of the beast, bringing it under the leadership of reason. Plato emphasizes the need to integrate the animalistic faculties of the psyche (appetite and spirit) into a harmonious whole in order to transcend destructive behavior. The philosopher must consciously direct the beastly impulses in order to escape from the cave.

Tocqueville fears that democratic citizens will become “nothing but a flock of timid and industrious animals, with the government as its shepherd” (2004, p. 819). In his account, democratic individuals are becoming passive mechanical brutes who lack the ability to follow their “sublime instincts” into the eternal and immortal realm of God. In fact, Tocqueville considers war as a means of awakening the slumbering masses. Thus whereas Plato and Hobbes are concerned about monstrous predators, Tocqueville is worried that humans are becoming beasts of burden. In this respect, animalization functions different within Tocqueville – and within Douglass, Marx and Arendt – than it does within Plato, Hobbes, and Romero. Slavery (for Douglass), modern democracy (for Tocqueville), industrial capitalism (for Marx), and totalitarianism (for Arendt) reduce humans into passive, productive mechanical animals. From this perspective, the passive brutes of modern industrial civilization need the vital energies of the beast in order to escape from their mechanistic enslavement.

Romero perhaps most clearly demonstrates that the beast is necessary to escape from civil slavery. His zombie apocalypse narratives suggest that the beast will eventually seize control of the automaton slave, regardless of conscious choice or desire, if one does not establish a balanced psychic ecology. In his films, humans have been possessed by a beastly hunger that destroys all forms of containment. In *Night*, this beastly force is focused upon consuming living humans. In *Land*, Romero depicts zombies evolving into a revolutionary group that overthrows a brutal and exploitative capitalist order, and thus hopes that we may utilize the beast for the purpose of revolution.

Conclusion

The typical horror narrative depicts the monster as an abnormal other. It concludes with social authorities destroying the monster and thus upholding normality. Canonical monster theorists, in contrast, argue that the monster is within the normal human self. They utilize monstrous space in order to depict humans as the unconscious slaves of cannibal machines. The monster itself is a hybrid that ruptures epistemic frameworks, revealing deep conflicts within the human self. It is a mechanism of vision that shines light upon the darkened areas of self, society and history. Whereas the automaton represents a self that has become a slavish mechanism, the cannibal embodies destructive predation.

While the monster is a complex and mysterious entity, some scholars have overstated its complexity and amorphousness. The monsters of the canon reveal that human monstrosity, from Plato to Romero, addresses a common set of themes, including intellectual slavery, appetitive tyranny and cannibalism. Monstrosity does fluctuate and change over time, but it appears to do so within the context of a general pattern, shifting back and forth between mechanical slavery and cannibal consumption. As a group, my canonical monster theorists suggest that civilization is a cannibalistic entity that devours its subjects, and that individuals must utilize reason in order to harmonize the psychic faculties within, transcend social fragmentation, and eliminate the various manifestations of individual and social appetitive tyranny.

Chapter 3—Platonic Monstrosity: Appetitive Excess and Societal Degeneration

Any extreme is liable to produce a violent reaction; this is as true of the weather and plants and animals as of political societies.

-Plato

Introduction

Plato's *Republic* provides us with a case study of a political theorist who utilizes monstrosity for epistemological and political purposes, in order to reveal human dysfunction and critique society. Plato's masterpiece features a monstrous model of the human psyche; a political account of monstrosity that correlates specific monsters with various political societies (oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny); and a critique of the democratic character that resonates with the defining attributes of Romero's zombies.

Plato, more than any other of my monster theorists, provides a clear and coherent theoretical account of monstrosity. He explains what a monster is, and why and how it arises. He also describes how monstrosity varies according to the different societal forms within which it appears. In this chapter I situate Plato's psychological model of monstrosity within the context of his theory of societal degeneration. According to this theory, different monsters arise as society degenerates from oligarchy to democracy to tyranny. Oligarchy produces the drone, while democracy is defined by the animalistic mass. The insane and bloodthirsty tyrant rules tyranny. Plato's monstrous figures are manifestations of the degeneracy of the society within which they appear. They are barometers of societal death and decline. Plato thus develops a political reading of monstrosity. He shows how different societies make their subjects into monsters, while evaluating those monsters within a general theory of societal decay.

Excessive desire and untamed passion are the causes of degeneration and monstrosity throughout this process. They destroy the characters and societies within which they manifest, producing new, more degraded, character types and social forms. The new character types embody opposite excesses in relation to the types from which they emerged. Human monstrosity therefore maintains continuity over time, across societal forms. Each monster is a slave to some form of excessive appetite and rational deficiency. At the same time, appetitive tyranny and mental illusion manifest differently within the various societal forms.

The tyrant – ruler of the most “imperfect” form of society – is a cannibal wolf-man. His bloodlust leads him to prey upon his fellow humans. Plato’s other monstrous figures – the drone, the democratic mass, and the prisoner – may appear to be quite different from mythic monsters like the wolf-man. However, Plato uses animalistic and beastly imagery to describe them. Each of these figures is a hybrid being that is deficient in reason and excessive in appetite. Each is a destructive consumer driven by unnecessary desires and illusions.

Plato argues that excess is a catalyst of violence, degeneration and monstrosity. “Any extreme is liable to produce a violent reaction; this is as true of the weather and plants and animals as of political societies” (563e-564a). Anything that manifests in an extreme manner will become a degenerate and violent expression of its opposite. In political theory, monster talk helps us make sense of this basic Platonic notion that an excess of something will produce an excess of its opposite.

The Metaphysics of Monstrosity

The monsters of myth and legend are threatening creatures that come from beyond the borders of the known world. They are dangerous beings that must be expelled and destroyed in order to protect self and society. However, certain human figures are also regularly cast in the role of the monster: the ghost, the ghoul, and the witch, for instance. Although in such cases human figures are the predatory beings, they are not normal members of the human community. Like their non-human peers, they are rare, exceptional, extraordinary entities. They are singular figures, or members of small groups, that dwell outside of the normative and/or physical borders of a community.

Plato reverses the traditional relationship between the human and the monster. His monsters are not deadly beasts or strange humans that dwell in foreign lands or the dark recesses of nature. Plato locates monstrosity at the heart of personhood, within the psyches of supposedly civilized humans. He argues that the monstrous appetite we should be concerned with is not embodied within abnormal or hideous physical forms; it is our own. His monsters are normal humans with disordered souls, driven by untamed passion and beastly hunger.

Plato's monsters arise from the dark depths of human souls stricken by unruly appetite, excessive desire, and rational deficiency. Reason "subject[s] the beast in us to our human, or perhaps I should say our divine, element, while the other enslaves our humaner nature to the beast" (589c-d). One who sells their "son or daughter as a slave to harsh and wicked masters, however high the price...ruthlessly enslaves the divinest part of oneself to the most godless and abominable" (589e). In such persons the "beast" rules the human instead of the "divine" element (589c); the "best" part of the soul is enslaved

to “worst” part (589e). Hobbes and Tocqueville will also associate reason with divinity, and base appetite with the animal or beast. Each of these theorists is interested in a project of collective de-animalization.

According to Plato, the soul is composed of three distinct but interconnected faculties¹⁹: appetite or desire (*epithymia*), spirit (*thumos*), and reason (*logistikon*). The appetitive faculty is the source of “instinctive desires,” which include the desire for food, sex, money, and pleasure more generally (Plato, trans., 1955/1987, p. 371, footnote 1). Spirit is a faculty that generates “emotional conviction” (Asma, 2009, p. 52), including courage and ambition (Plato, trans., 1955/1987, p. 371, footnote 1). Reason is the distinctively human faculty (Asma, p. 54). With the assistance of spirit, it can harmoniously integrate the faculties of the self and overcome monstrous excess. It allows us to tame desire and spirit, see through illusion, access the truth of the Forms, and transcend the material world. However, in the many disordered souls that populate human societies, the faculties are out of alignment such that the ruling element, reason, is weak, undeveloped, and overpowered by instinctive desires and energetic passions.

At the end of Book IV, which examines the various imperfect societies, Socrates says, “let us construct a model of the human personality” (588b). In order to represent the psychic disarray of the typical person, he constructs a hybrid monstrosity, “like one of those composite beasts in the old myths, Chimaera and Schylla and Cerberus and all the rest, which combine more than one kind of creature in one” (588c). Socrates asks us to “imagine a very complicated, many-headed sort of beast, with heads of wild and tame

¹⁹ Scholars often use “part” to discuss Plato’s view of the soul. As Lee (1955/1987) points out, there is some degree of uncertainty as to whether “part” is the most precise translation. This may give too absolute a sense of separation. I prefer to follow Asma (2011), who uses “faculties” or “aspects of the soul” (p. 52). This term not only avoids the problem of giving the sense that the soul has separate parts, but it also better connects to modern psychological discourse.

animals all around it, which it can produce and change at will” (588c). To this image he adds “two other sorts of creature, one a lion, the other a man” (588d). Socrates asks us to imagine that the first two images are contained within the third: A wild, hungry, many-headed monster and a ferocious lion dwell inside a weak human, which Asma (2011) refers to as a “small homunculus” (p. 52).

In Plato’s account, typical humans are not aware of their psychic dysfunction. In fact, their lack of self-awareness is a central element of their dysfunction. As discussed in the previous chapter, the monster embodies the invisible dysfunctions of self and society. “To eyes unable to see anything beneath the outer shell,” Plato says of his monstrous model, “it looks like a single creature, a man” (588d). Plato uses monstrosity in order to visualize and analyze the otherwise hidden dynamics of human psychic dysfunction. His model is made for the human majority, for those typical individuals who lack the clarity of vision and self-objectivity to see that they are monsters; for those who do not realize that they have given themselves over to the beast, and forsaken their connection to the divine.

The many-headed creature represents appetite run amok. The small man symbolizes reason in a weakened state. And the lion represents spirit, which may be channeled into the service of reason, or allowed to join appetite in a confused chaos of passions and desires. “Self-indulgence...gives too much freedom to the monstrous multiform creature within us,” Plato argues (590a). The self-indulgent individual seeks to “give the many-headed beast a good time, and to strengthen it and the lion and all its qualities, while starving the man till he becomes so weak that the other two can do what they like with him” (588e-589a). This person “makes no attempt to reconcile them and

make them friends, but leaves them to snarl and wrangle and devour each other” (589a). As Asma (2009) points out, when the lion takes control of the soul, “hot-headed, overly-aggressive, and passionate ‘animals’ result” (p. 54). “If the multiheaded desires (epithymia) rise to the dominant position (above reason and thumos), addictive hedonism tortures the individual with terminal unfulfillment and also tortures his or her immediate social circle with crime, betrayal, and treachery” (Asma, p. 54).

Plato’s monsters are persons of beastly appetite, untamed spirit, and undeveloped rationality. A chaotic web of passion-infused desires controls the souls of these individuals. Platonic monstrosity is thus the product of human attributes (desire and passion) and human tendencies (appetitive excess and rational deficiency). It is a condition, Plato believes, that we are all prone to. Monstrosity is the aspect of the self that we must conquer in order to ascend to spiritual truth and achieve an integrated psyche.

Although desire and passion manifest themselves in a monstrous fashion within the typical human, Plato does not see this as an inevitable or necessary condition. Monstrosity is a product of unregulated desire and passion, not desire and passion as such. These faculties are not in themselves monstrous. They become monstrous when we give them too much freedom, when we allow them to bind us to objects and sensations, and make us into destructive consumers of each other and society. When this happens, the beast and the lion oppose the order and harmony that we must cultivate in order to find truth and justice. However, one may “attempt to reconcile them and make them friends,” instead of allowing “them to snarl and wrangle and devour each other” (589a). Plato believes that humans should order and regulate their psyches in a conscious

and disciplined manner such that reason, with the assistance of spirit, tames and integrates the instincts, thereby creating freedom from excess and inner harmony.

Reason is the answer or antidote to monstrosity, the faculty that harmonizes the faculties of the soul and orients the individual towards the Good.²⁰ However, the dialectical reasoning of the philosopher is not the narrow, economic reasoning of the oligarch, who represses the beast and fixates upon making money. Nor is it the opportunistic philosophizing of the Sophist, who panders to the “large and powerful animal” of democracy (493a-b). Finally, it is not the insanity and delusion of the wolf-man, who sacrifices himself to the beast within, just as he sacrifices those he rules in order to satiate his bloodlust. We are not after the sexual repression and selfish accumulation of Ebenezer Scrooge, the pandering and self-indulgence of JFK, or the insanity and passion for destruction of Hitler, but the rational harmony and divinely inspired self-sacrifice of Socrates. Socrates, the heroic embodiment of philosophical wisdom, has broken the spell of monstrous desire and illusion, and devoted himself to the good of the whole. He has brought appetite and spirit into the service of reason.

Plato conceives of society as a singular organism. As Schmitt notes, Plato is the first to represent “a commonwealth as a ‘huge man’” (1938/2008, p. 5).²¹ Indeed, Plato establishes a parallelism between the individual and society such that the two mirror each other. “Justice can be a characteristic of an individual or of a community,” he claims

²⁰ Is it possible to have an excessive desire or passion for the Good? According to Plato’s theory of the soul, those who have been turned towards the Good are no longer controlled by excessive desire or spirit. As the Good manifests its divine presence within the life of the individual, the imperfections of the human are eliminated. In other words, the Good by its nature establishes balance and eliminates excess. The journey out of the cave is the journey into psychic harmony.

²¹ Schmitt specifically references “a mob stirred by irrational emotions, a multiheaded and ‘multicolored creature’” (p. 5). He is thus referring to the monstrous model of the personality in Book IV, where Plato discusses the “many-headed sort of beast” (588c). Schmitt may also be thinking of Plato’s discussion of the Sophist in Book VI, where the mass is described as “a large and powerful animal” (493a-b).

(368e). Socrates begins his search for justice within the latter because “a community is larger than an individual” (368e). “We may therefore find justice on a larger scale in the larger entity” (368e). “The overriding metaphor of the *Republic*,” notes Asma (2009), “is the equation of justice with the healthy condition of an organism and injustice with the diseased condition” (p. 53). In other words, we may more clearly see the disease and dysfunction that afflicts the smaller person in the larger one.²²

Plato argues that the division of the soul into three faculties reflects the division of society into three different groups or classes. The “Guardians” or “Rulers” (415e), who have trained long and hard in philosophy and geometry, represent the reasoning faculty of society. The “Auxiliaries” or “Soldiers” (414d), who “assist the Rulers in the execution of their decisions”(414b), embody the spirited faculty. “The farmers and other workers” (415a), those who produce necessary goods, represent society’s appetitive faculty. According to Plato’s “magnificent myth” (414b) – “a fairy story like those the poets tell and have persuaded people to believe about the sort of thing that often happened ‘once upon a time’...” (414c) – Rulers have gold souls, Soldiers have silver souls, and farmers and other producers have souls of iron and bronze (415a). Every individual has each of the three faculties but is defined by one or the other depending upon which soul type they possess. Only under the leadership of those who embody the excellence of reason, the philosopher rulers, can society transform from “a large and powerful animal” (493a-b), ruled by beastly appetites and blinded by illusions, into a harmonious organism. Justice in the soul manifests when one has integrated the three faculties in reason, and justice in

²² Hobbes (1651/1966) makes a similar argument in his discussion of the “the rage of the whole multitude” (p. 64). Revolutionary individuals “will clamour, fight against, and destroy those, by whom all their lifetime before, they have been protected, and secured from injury” (p. 64). While their “singular passions” may be invisible, they “are parts of the seditious roaring of a troubled nation” (p. 64). In other words, the monstrous passion of the individual is invisible but that of “the whole multitude is visible enough” (p. 63).

society may rise when the three classes have been harmonized under the leadership of true philosophers like Socrates.

The Degeneration of Humanity

In addition to his monstrous model of the personality, Plato deploys specific monstrous figures within a political narrative of societal decline. With this narrative, “Plato gives us a theory about how human monsters, of the psychological variety, actually emerge and evolve, and how they can be prevented” (Asma, p. 54). Before examining his political monsters, we should briefly review his explanation of how different forms of society and character arise and degenerate into more perverse configurations.

Philosophers – those who possess knowledge of the Good – rule in the ideal society. Within this political regime, individuals efficiently regulate their energies and movements according to their defining soul element, and thereby produce a harmonious and symmetrical social organism. However, this perfect form of society does not exist. “There’s no existing form of society good enough for the philosophic nature” (497b). “If only it could find a social structure whose excellence matched its own, then its truly divine quality would appear clearly,” Socrates laments (497b). In this situation “all other characters and ways of life stand revealed as merely human” (497b). The philosophic type is thus not able to bring forth its divine nature. Instead, “it gets warped and altered, like a foreign seed sown in alien soil under whose influence it commonly degenerates into the local growth. In exactly the same way the philosophic type loses its true powers, and falls into habits alien to it” (497b).

Without the leadership of the philosopher, society changes and decays in four distinct stages, with each stage corresponding to a particular type of degenerate society: timarchy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. Plato posits that each of these “imperfect societies” is a degeneration of the previous form: timarchy degenerates into oligarchy; oligarchy into democracy; and democracy into tyranny. According to Lee (1955/1987), these societies “are described as if they occurred in that order in a historical series; but Plato is concerned with a moral degeneration, and the historical framework should not be taken too literally” (p. 356). These forms constitute a sequence of increasing psychic and societal decay that terminates in the absolute degeneracy of tyranny. Tyranny is the worst form, the most decayed, the furthest from the changeless perfection of the ideal society.

Societal forms are manifestations of human character. “Societies aren’t made of sticks and stones,” Plato writes, “but of men whose individual characters, by turning the scale one way or another, determine the direction of the whole” (544d-e). Each society corresponds to a specific character type: the timarchic character, the oligarchic character, the democratic character, and the tyrannical character. This does not mean that every individual within a society will necessarily embody the same character type. It means that the defining character type will be the “ideal man” of the society in question, that the traits of that character type will be celebrated (Lee, 1955/1987, p. 356).

Character types are defined by a particular object of desire that orients and determines the life pattern of the individual inhabiting that character. The philosopher seeks the Good. The timarch aims at honor through competitive victory. The oligarch attempts to accumulate as much money as possible. The democrat desires freedom. The

tyrant pursues the absolute domination of his political subjects. The imperfect character types – and the societies they animate – are driven by an excessive desire for the particular object or principle that structures their life-activity.

In oligarchy, the oligarch's excessive desire for money produces a class of destructive consumers – the drones. Plato splits the drones into two types. The first is lazy and indolent and becomes a beggar. The second is more energetic and becomes a criminal (552c-d). The leaders within democracy come from this second group of more energetic drones. In democracy, the monstrosity that first emerged in oligarchy with the drones spreads throughout society, giving rise to the mass. The members of the mass are not lazy criminals (the first drone type), and nor are they energetic criminals (the second drone type). The mass is defined by unruly appetite, lack of direction and distinction in life, and the absence of clarity. The mass eventually embraces one of the criminal drones as their champion, thus bringing the tyrant wolf-man into power. The wolf-man embodies the insanity and bloodlust of the power-drunk leader.

Platonic monstrosity in general signifies the failure of rational order and the triumph of excessive and unregulated desire and passion. Plato's monstrous model of the human personality (the many-headed appetitive beast, the untamed lion, and the starving human) reflects the general condition of those individuals who constitute the drone class, the democratic mass, and the tyrannized mass. However, monstrosity looks different within each of the imperfect societies. The drone, the mass, and the wolf-man are elaborations or modifications of the general model. They reveal different configurations of excessive desire/rational deficiency. The general model does not capture the specifically more degenerate versions of monstrosity that appear as the beast and the lion

devour the individual, as society consumes itself and self-destructs into tyranny.

Throughout the degeneration process the social body is becoming increasingly polluted with unnecessary, wasteful and destructive elements until the death of humanity is sounded by the insane howl of the lupine tyrant.

Although Plato's narrative may not be an explicit reference to historical time, it nonetheless allows us to account for changes in the individual and in society over time:

The fascinating thing about the ethical theory of the *Republic* is its developmental approach. People aren't born saints or born criminals, they are made that way through bad nurturing and personal habits of indulging the wrong appetites. Plato is telling us how normal people can become monstrous over time. (Asma, 2009, p. 53)

Plato provides us with a theoretical map of the causes, symptoms and stages of human monstrosity. He also offers us a cure. The majority of individuals may succumb to the particular form of monstrosity that defines their society (and/or to the particular psychic condition in which they exist), but they need not do so. Through proper education and self-discipline we may come to see and break free from the chains that enslave our psyches.

Canonical political theorists are often eager to show readers the hidden dysfunctions that insidiously limit their capacity to achieve the good life. In *The Republic*, Plato frequently demonstrates how the political theorist may utilize the monster for this purpose within the context of his degeneration narrative. His monsters show us the unseen disfigurements of the various character types and societal forms. They provide a means for the reader to imagine, analyze and convey the monstrosity within.

The Drone

The oligarchic or money-loving character is driven by necessary desire. Necessary desire “we could also call acquisitive, because of its practical usefulness” (559c). Plato gives, as specific examples of necessary desires, those that are conducive to health, such as “the desire to eat enough for health and fitness, and the desire for the bread and meat requisite for the purpose” (559a-b). Necessary desires are those directed toward acquiring the practical necessities of life. Although these desires are necessary, the oligarch is unnecessarily or excessively attached to them.

The oligarch is the financial schemer, “the grasping money-maker” (555b), and thus fixated upon accumulating wealth. In this character “there’s no moral conviction, no taming of desire by reason, but only the compulsion of fear” (554d). The oligarch deploys a greedy, calculative form of reasoning, not the harmonizing reason of the philosopher ruler. Afraid of losing what has been accumulated, and exhibiting a “general carefulness” (544c), this cautious individual “fights with only part of himself, and though he loses the battle he saves his money” (555a). Plato’s oligarch is similar to Tocqueville’s democrat. Both are lovers of money who excessively grasp after the necessities of life, and both fear partying ways with what they have accumulated.

The oligarch’s money fetish generates four societal defects. First, political leaders acquire office through wealth instead of through knowledge and expertise (551c). Second, society is divided into the rich and the poor, two hostile factions who “are always plotting against each other” (551d). Third, oligarchies cannot wage war, for the rich “are too grasping to want to pay the expenses” (551d-e). The worst defect of oligarchy, however, is that it produces a class of “drones” (552a), which emerge as a

result of the oligarch's excessive necessary desire and corresponding repression of other desires.

Plato does not advocate repression. He believes that one should make a friend of the beast, not ignore or repress it. Discussing the "man of sound and disciplined character" (571d), Plato writes: "His desires he has neither starved nor indulged, so that they sink to rest and don't plague the highest part of him with their joys and sorrows" (571e). But the oligarch does not relate to the beast in this manner. The oligarch is "economical and hard-working, satisfying only his necessary wants and indulging in no other expenses, but repressing his other desires as pointless" (554a). By repressing non-economic desires, the oligarch contains "evil impulses" (554d). However, he "is never at peace in himself" (554d). Repression produces "a kind of dual personality, in which the better desires on the whole master the worse (554d-e). This is not a stable psychic configuration. Repressing the beast does not eliminate it. The drones will emerge and destroy oligarchic society. The oligarch thus resembles the divided self of psychoanalysis and modern horror narratives. In the relationship between the oligarch and the drone one can see a reflection of the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde. In other words, the drone represents an ancient version of the "return of the repressed."

The oligarch's excessive desire for wealth is the undoing of oligarchy. The drones arise in oligarchy when the oligarchic youth devote themselves to a life of indulgent pleasure. The repressive self-control of the parents leads to laziness and excessive self-indulgence amongst the next generation. The obsessive pursuit of economic advantage becomes indolence, poverty and destructive consumption. By pushing too far in one direction (production and accumulation), oligarchic individuals

create an excess in the opposite direction (passive dissolution and consumption) amongst their children. We will see a similar dynamic in the transition from the automaton personality of the 1950s to the Romero zombie of the 1960s.

“The reason for their existence,” explains Plato of the drones, “is lack of education, bad upbringing and a bad form of government” (552e). The rich’s desire for gain leads them to neglect “all other considerations,” including the formation of balanced characters amongst the population, and social harmony. Blinded by greed, they prey upon the population. They “inject their poisoned loans wherever they can find a victim, and...demand high rates of interest on the sum lent, with the result that the drones and beggars multiply” (555e-556a).

The predatory behavior of the rich leads to the deterioration of their own class, as young members of the oligarchy are among its victims. The oligarchs do not prevent the young from “squandering their money and ruining themselves; for it is by loans to such spendthrifts or by buying up their property that they hope to increase their own wealth and influence” (555b-c). The rich, driven by greed, unwittingly contribute to the transmogrification of their young into a monstrous class of destructive consumers.

Living a “sheltered life” of “luxury and idleness, physical and mental,” the oligarchic youth “lose their ability to resist pain or pleasure,” and come to possess “superfluous flesh” (556b-d). In other words, the dissolute youth become excessive consumers. They eat to excess. The drone thus originates in the unrestrained consumption of the young oligarchs:

When our pauper was rich, did he perform any of the useful social functions...simply by spending his money? Though he may have appeared to

belong to the ruling class, surely in fact he was neither ruling, nor serving society in any other way; he was merely a consumer of goods. (552b)

One class's unrestrained greed, which is acquisitive and accumulating, thus gives way to passive consumption in another class, the successor generation. "Just as a drone grows in its cell to be a plague to the hive," the child of the oligarch "grows up in his own home to be a plague to the community" (552c).

Plato derives his drone metaphor from his understanding of bee culture: a real drone is a male bee that lacks a stinger, does not produce honey, and exists for the sole function of breeding. Plato argues that these creatures are a destructive infection of the hive (564b-c): "A drone grows in its cell to be a plague to the hive" (552c). Therefore "the bee-keeper who knows his job will try to prevent drones being bred at all, and if they are bred cut them out at once, cells and all" (564c). The drone is thus a human-insect hybrid, a destructive consumer that is deficient in reason and excessive appetite.

Plato applies the drone metaphor to those "without any real function" (552a), whom he describes as "a class of thriftless idlers" (564b). He is specifically thinking of beggars and criminals (including thieves, pickpockets and temple robbers) (552d), both of which are plentiful in oligarchy (552e). Plato deviates somewhat from the biological basis of his metaphor by dividing human drones into two groups according to the presence or absence of "stings." While "all winged drones have been created by god without stings...our two-footed ones vary, some having no stings and some very formidable ones" (552c). Those with stings are the "energetic leaders" of this class (564b). Those without stings form "the more inert mass of followers" (564b). "The stingless type end their days as beggars, the stinging type as what we call criminals"

(552c-d). The drone is thus an undisciplined and functionless individual, living a dissolute life of consumption. He is either a passive (the beggar) or active (the criminal) plague upon the community. In democracy, the criminal drones will become the leaders of society, and the drones as a whole will grow and flourish as monstrosity permeates the social order.

In addition to these two types of drones, Plato also mentions “drone desires” in his discussion of the oligarchic character (554d). As always, he parallels micro and macro, internal and external. His individual character types correspond to social formations; they are also expressions of a particular aspect or dynamic of the soul. The drone is, in relation to the soul, an unnecessary, wasteful and dangerous desire. Dangerous and unnecessary drone desires deteriorate the soul, just as drone individuals buzz around and prey upon the social body.

The Democratic Mass

Democracy emerges when the poor, led by criminal drones, overthrow the oligarchic rich. The democratic revolutionaries institute freedom and equality as the generative principles of civic and political society (557a). Summarizing the spirit of democracy, Plato writes, “there is liberty and freedom of speech in plenty, and every individual is free to do as he likes” (557b). In democracy, the people arrange their lives according to personal preference, to the detriment of order and harmony.

Democracy bespeaks an advanced state of degeneration. A great deal of the energy and movement expended by the individual and society are unnecessary, wasteful and destructive. Licentious liberty fuels the growth and political ascendancy of the drone class. The drones grow in numbers, become “a good deal more energetic,” and begin to

feed upon the once predatory rich (564d-e). Democracy elevates criminals – one of whom will become the tyrannical wolf-man – to political leadership. In democracy, a gang of predatory criminals leads a pleasure-seeking mass, as monstrosity proliferates throughout society.

Despite their growth and newfound political prominence, the drones are not the most significant group within democracy. The dominant class “is the mass of the people, who earn their own living, take little interest in politics, and aren’t very well off. They are the largest class in a democracy, and once assembled are supreme” (565a).

What is the psychological makeup of the democratic character? Plato distinguishes the democrat from the oligarch according to the types of desire that predominate within their souls. While the oligarch is driven by necessary desires, those pertaining to the necessities of biology and commerce, the democrat is glutted with “unnecessary desires,” those “which can be got rid of with practice, if we start young, and whose presence either does us no good or positive harm” (559a).

The unnecessary desires of the democratic character are rooted in the pleasures of the flesh. Plato traces the birth of the democratic character to the degeneration of the oligarch into a life of slothful debauchery. The democrat originates when the son of the oligarch “gets a taste of the drones’ honey and gets into brutal and dangerous company, where he can be provided with every variety and refinement of pleasure” (559d-e). This figure is born of sensuous indulgence in luxurious foods, harmful entertainment, promiscuous sexuality, and the like. Thus the democratic mass, moved by the promise of pleasurable consumption, “won’t assemble often unless they are given their share of honey” (565a).

The people utilize their freedom within the framework of a conflicted psyche that is deficient in reason and entangled in unnecessary desires. Indulging appetite, they give vent to the untamed beast within, allowing their souls to be pulled this way and that by a mass of unruly hungers and passions. The democratic individual “gives the many-headed beast a good time,” leaving it and the lion “to snarl and wrangle and devour each other” (589a). In democratic society, uncontrolled appetite determines the dysfunctional life pattern of the mass.

Plato depicts the mass as “a large and powerful animal” that is manipulated by the Sophist (493b). The Sophist is an individual who projects the image of being a true philosopher, but who is actually a deceptive opportunist. The Sophist is familiar with “the creature’s tastes and desires” (493b), has “made a study of its moods and wants” (493b), and thus knows “when to approach and handle it,” when it is “especially savage or gentle...and what tone of voice to use to soothe or annoy it” (493b).

Democratic citizens – glutted with unnecessary desires, led by opportunistic drones, and manipulated by unprincipled sophists – constitute an unruly mass driven by appetite and illusion. Thus one must be careful of “the frenzy of the masses” (496c). If individuals are “not prepared to join others in their wickedness, and yet are unable to fight the general savagery single-handed, they are likely to perish like a man thrown among wild beasts” (496d). With his zombies, Romero renders unmistakable the monstrosity of the democratic mass, but Plato had long ago noted that its basic features are a monstrous outgrowth of democracy.

The democrat’s excessive desire for liberty is the undoing of democracy. It transforms the free and equal democratic citizen into the subject of tyrannical

domination. Excessive desire for liberty produces an unconscious mass of destructive consumers, and ultimately gives birth to the tyrannical wolf-man.

The Tyrannical Wolf-Man

The drones, as we have seen, become stronger and more numerous within democracy. The more energetic members of this class – the drones with stings, the criminals – become the political leaders of society. From this group arises a “champion of the people,” the figure who will become the tyrannical wolf-man. The tyrant is a degenerative by-product of the democratic mass, a monstrous figure that bridges democracy and tyranny.

Why does democracy degenerate into tyranny? Democracy continues the process of psychic dissolution that began under oligarchy with the drone. It erodes rational rule of the soul within, just as it destroys external vertical relationships based upon wisdom and authority. It assigns political office by lot, not rational expertise. Popular opinions, dressed in the poetic garb of sophistic parasites, parade as truth. The people’s destruction of rational order creates a political void that is filled through their embrace of the tyrant.

Plato argues that the psychic catalyst of this transformation is the mental sensitivity and jealousy of the democrats regarding their freedom. “The minds of citizens become so sensitive that the least vestige of restraint is resented as intolerable, till finally...in their determination to have no master they disregard all laws, written or unwritten” (563d). The determination to have no master “is the root from which tyranny springs” (563e). The weak and indulgent democratic self installs itself as the sole and ultimate authority, resenting and rebelling against external restraints upon its sovereignty. Eventually, this absolute rejection of restraint becomes the demand for absolute restraint,

just as the oligarch's excessive desire for productivity and wealth became destructive dissolution.

As we have seen, Plato explains transitions in character and society in terms of his theoretical account of excess. "So from an extreme of liberty one is likely to get, in the individual and in society, a reaction to an extreme of subjection" (564a). "The most savage subjection" arises "from an excess of liberty" (564a). Plato's account of the degeneration from democracy into tyranny, like his account of oligarchy into democracy, rests upon the metaphysical principle that any quality taken to the extreme will transform into an excessive version of its opposite. The opposite of liberty is slavery. Democratic individuals are extreme in their expression of liberty, and thus bring about an extreme version of enslavement.

Plato – like Tocqueville – thus sees a causal link between the psychology of mass democracy and tyranny. For each of these thinkers, democracy psychologically weakens individuals to the point that they demand or passively accept tyrannical subjection. Tocqueville discusses the central role of equality in this process. In Plato's view "an excessive desire for liberty at the expense of everything else is what undermines democracy and leads to the demand for tyranny" (562c).

The tyrant represents a further degeneration of the drone type and its dissolute existence. He represents the endpoint of Plato's monstrous narrative tracking the self-destructive fall of humanity into mental and instinctual chaos and darkness. The tyrant "combines the characteristics of drunkenness, lust and madness" (573c).

The soul of the tyrant is tyrannized by "a master passion" (572e). "Wicked wizards who want to make him a tyrant" implant this passion in him "to control the idle

desires that divide his time between them,” and to ensure that he enters into political office (572e-573a). Plato does not specifically state who these “wicked wizards” are, but it seems that he believes there are some sort of political puppet masters behind the scenes who psychologically manipulate the tyrant.

Plato compares the master passion of the tyrannical soul to “a great winged drone” (572e-573a). The life of the individual with a master passion “is a round of extravagant feasts and orgies and sex and so on” (573d). However, the most distinctive element of the tyrant is criminality and evil:

His passion tyrannizes over him, a despot without restraint or law, and drives him (as a tyrant drives a state) into any venture that will profit itself and its gang, a gang collected partly from the evil company he keeps and partly from impulses within himself which these same evil practices have freed from restraint. (574e-575a)

Plato introduces a new form of desire to distinguish the tyrannical character type from the others. “Some of the unnecessary pleasures and desires,” he explains, “are lawless and violent” (571b):

The sort that wake while we sleep, when the reasonable and humane part of us is asleep and its control relaxed, and our fierce bestial nature, full of food and drink, rouses itself and has its fling and tries to secure its own kind of satisfaction. (571c)

As society and its characters progressively degenerate, they move further from the human, and ever closer to the monstrous animal. Democratic citizens, driven by licentious liberty, feed the lion and beast within the self, destroying necessary discipline

and restraint. Mental and instinctual monstrosity thus proliferates throughout democratic society. However, although the people are psychically polluted, they nonetheless maintain some decency and order. They are not criminals. The drones lead democratic society, but laws and norms contain their criminality somewhat. Tyranny explodes all limits, controls and obstacles to the beastly animal within, and the pleasurable consumption of the democrat becomes sadistic predation. Lawless and violent desires, which are normally submerged beneath the conscious persona, arise from the darkest depths of the psyche, and come to dominate the soul of the tyrant. “He becomes in his waking life what he was once only occasionally in his dreams, and there’s nothing, no taboo, no murder, however terrible, from which he will shrink” (574e-575a).

The tyrant is a human who has fed the inner beast and lion to the point of complete self-dehumanization. He identifies with raw, uninhibited animalism without shame or remorse. Unleashed and inflamed, the appetitive faculty will attempt any act:

It’s completely lost to all sense and shame. It doesn’t shrink from attempting intercourse (as it supposes) with a mother or anyone else, man, beast or god, or from murder or eating forbidden food.²³ There is, in fact, no folly nor shamelessness it will not commit. (571c-d)

The tyrant wolf-man is thoroughly and openly possessed by the uncontrolled and savage desires that were previously hidden and more-or-less contained within the souls of the previous character types. Appetitive tyranny and passionate excess are fully embodied in the wolf-man.

²³ Human flesh is, of course, the ultimate “forbidden food.” In the zombie apocalypse, the entire democratic mass exhibits an insatiable desire for this forbidden food.

Plato introduces the tyrant as a man who has been initiated into the ways of the cannibal. The popular rulers' taste for destructive predation of fellow citizens changes him into a wolf. Plato references "the story about the shrine of Zeus Lykaios in Arcadia" (565d). According to this story, "the man who tastes a single piece of human flesh, mixed in with the rest of the sacrifice, is fated to become a wolf" (565d-e). "Destroying a human life, and getting an unholy taste of the blood of his fellows" (565e), this individual "changes[s] from man to wolf and make[s] himself tyrant" (566a).

Tyranny is the monstrous truth of each of the imperfect societal forms. "What is harbored in each of those types is eventually revealed, until at last the secret of all corrupt types emerges: 'tyranny indeed, *openly avowed*...'" (Mitchell, 2006, p. 79). "Philosophy is the only real type, Socrates says; all others conceal tyranny" (p. 79). Similarly, although the tyrant is a singular individual linked to the most degenerate form of society, he embodies what each and every one of us may become. As Mitchell (2006) notes, "Socrates and Thrasymachus²⁴ are the two great alternatives" (p. 79).

Plato's ancient account of the wolf-man is not without modern and contemporary significance. As Wilhem Reich explains in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1970/1995), fascism releases "the perverse, sadistic character layer," "the 'monster in man,' our layer of 'secondary drives,' the Freudian 'unconscious,'" which is normally contained beneath the "mask of cultivation," the exterior, civilized, bourgeois personality (p. xii). The long list of "Nazi zombie" films²⁵ takes on a deeper significance in this

²⁴ Thrasymachus is a sophist who argues in Book I "that justice or right is simply what is in the interest of the stronger party" (338c). He thus defends wolfish predation.

²⁵ *King of the Zombies* (1941), *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943), *The Frozen Dead* (1966), *Shock Waves* (1977), *Zombie Lake* (1981), *Night of the Zombies* (1981), *Oasis of the Zombies* (1981), *The Treasure of the Living Dead* (1982), *La Tumba de Los Muertos Vivientes* (1983), *Hard Rock Zombies* (1985), *Puppet Master III: Toulon's Revenge* (1991), *Operation Nazi Zombies* (2003), *Horrors of War* (2006), *War of the*

light. Indeed, the zombies in these films enact sadistic predation upon their victims.

However, what they reveal does not pertain only to explicitly fascistic societies.

“Fascism is an *international* phenomenon, which pervades all bodies of human society of *all* nations,” argues Reich (p. xiii):

My character-analytic experiences have convinced me that there is not a single individual who does not bear the elements of fascist feeling and thinking in his structure. As a political movement fascism differs from other reactionary parties inasmuch as it is *borne and championed by masses of people*. (pp. xiii-xiv)

Just as the wolf-man is the secret, rotten core of all of the imperfect character types, so does the Nazi zombie reveal a disgusting truth about contemporary subjectivity, or what it might become under certain social or political conditions.

Plato’s dysfunctional characters move from a focus upon monetary accumulation, to pleasurable consumption, to sadistic predation. Similarly, we see three stages in the evolution of the zombie: from the controlled worker slaves of *White Zombie* (1932) and the automaton conformists of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), to the hungry consumers of *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), to the sadistic killing-machines of *28 Days Later* (2002). The running zombies of *28 Days* are, like the tyrant, victims of an insane bloodlust. They are not so much interested in eating other humans, as they are in killing them. The subgenre as a whole has moved closer to a more sadistic form of zombieism in recent years.

The further degeneration in the zombie subgenre suggests that, within the context of Plato’s narrative, America entered a more degenerative, tyrannical phase or period in

Dead (2006), *Outpost* (2008), *Dead Snow* (2009), *Blood Creek* (2009), *War of the Dead* (2011), *Outpost: Black Sun* (2012), *The 4th Reich* (in production).

the early 2000s. Romero makes this explicit in *Land of the Dead*. According to Russell (2005/2008), Romero presents the villainous human character in this film, Kaufman (a predatory capitalist/politician played by Dennis Hopper) “as a composite of George W. Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld” (p. 190). Those who surround Kaufman are “a group of rapacious businessmen,” “the zombie apocalypse’s answer to Enron” (p. 189). While such figures bring to mind Plato’s tyrant, the zombies and human characters of *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) bear a closer resemblance to Plato’s democratic mass. They are focused upon pleasurable consumption rather than sadistic predation.

In this respect, it is interesting to note the appearance of works such as Sheldon Wolin’s *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (2010), which advances the idea that American society has mutated into a hybrid political system, a mixture of mass democracy and traditional totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany.

The Cave and Its Prisoners

At the heart of *The Republic* lies a horrific premise: humans are semi-conscious prisoners who are completely unaware of their collective monstrosity. Socrates tells us of a group of people who have been bound in a dark subterranean cave from a young age. Held by chains, they do not move their bodies, including their heads. They stare straight ahead at the cave wall, upon which dance a variety of shadows. These shadows are projected from a walkway that is situated above and behind the prisoners, out of their field of vision. Unidentified persons carry objects past a fire as they navigate this walkway, thereby creating the shadows. These persons hold the objects above a curtain that hides them as they walk. The prisoners, absorbed by the play of shadows and the

occasional echo of voices emitted from the object-carriers, understand nothing of the production process of their visual and mental world.

When one of the prisoners is set free and forced to ascend to the surface, he finds each step of the way painful and disorienting. After a long period of adjustment, of increasing acclimation to the light of reality, he is able to glimpse the ultimate source of life and Truth – the Sun, the Form of the Good. Feeling compelled to return and assist the others, he makes an equally painful descent into the darkness and alerts the cave-dwellers of the true nature of their situation. Seeing a man who is disoriented and who speaks of things unknown, the prisoners, instead of showering their would-be liberator with gratitude, murder him.

Plato's cave is a horrific heuristic that reveals the hidden dysfunctions of humanity. Although a subterranean cave is a location that many would associate with non-human beasts, the prisoners are normal humans; "they are drawn from life," Socrates assures us (515a). With the cave, Plato depicts the mental monstrosity of the Athenian democratic mass, if not of humanity as a whole. The cave represents what the mind becomes without the rule of reason, when it is controlled by excessive desires and untamed passions.

Plato utilizes a spatial trope of the horror genre by dividing the world into an underground space of darkness and monstrosity, and an upper world of light and truth. For Plato, the journey out of monstrosity and into divinity is a movement upwards. Throughout *The Republic*, Plato argues that we must orient the individual and society towards the higher, truer, invisible realm of the Forms, and away from the visible, material world. That is, we must escape from the various forms of enslavement to

appetite and illusion that appear within human societies. The cave gives us a vivid image of this journey.

Plato deploys the subject positions of monster (the prisoner), hero (the liberator), and victim (the prisoner and the liberator). The prisoners are monstrous not only in their hybrid ontology (they are humans inserted into an apparatus), but also in their behavior. They are so disconnected from the divine light of the Good that they murder the heroic individual who attempts to reveal their monstrous condition. They kill the hero out of ignorance and fear of his epistemological otherness.

Although the prisoners are monstrous figures, the true villainous entity is the cave itself. It is a giant mechanism that consumes the minds of its captives, filling their heads with inaccurate opinions about the world, trapping their thoughts at the superficial level of mere perception. Unable to think, the prisoners cannot move, grow or develop. They are – unwittingly, unknowingly – enslaved to appetite and illusion.

Plato's prisoners constitute a mass organism, generic products of the machinery of collective perception. They behave like robots that predictably respond to the information that is fed into them. There is no individuality in the Cave, for individuality is the product of a process of increasingly complex dialectical introspection, of finding and unpacking the tensions and contradictions within reasoned positions. To remain in the Cave is to stagnate within the most base level of perception available to the human. The prisoners unknowingly submit to a form of invisible mass slavery.

Like Plato's cave, Hobbes's Leviathan reveals the political subject to be passively absorbed in spectacle: "The image absorbs viewers into the body politic and keeps them passive observers at one and the same time" (Rogin, 1987/1988, p. 300). That which

appears before the enthralled masses becomes their god. In the case of Leviathan, that which appears is a monstrous sovereign. In the cave, the spectacle itself is god. The passive obedience demanded by the spectacle will eventually bring about the sadistic violence and insanity of tyranny.

The prisoners are mental slaves to the endless and meaningless sequence of distorted shadows projected upon the wall of the cave within which they are entombed; they are living-dead souls lost in the phantasmagoria of a primitive cinematic apparatus. Indeed, the apparatus of the cave is comparable to that of cinema or television (Lee, 1987, p.316). In this respect, Plato's critique of democratic spectacle resonates with those advanced by theorists in the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, what Guy Debord (n.d.) writes in *The Society of the Spectacle*, could very well describe the cave:

The spectacle presents itself as a vast inaccessible reality that can never be questioned. Its sole message is: 'What appears is good; what is good appears.'
The passive acceptance it demands is already effectively imposed by its monopoly of appearances, its manner of appearing without allowing any reply.
(pp. 9-10)

Debord's critique is epitomized in the image of the masses passively consuming – and being consumed by – a popular film or television show. Plato also presents the democratic mass as captivated by spectacle. The prisoners are passive servants of the images that appear before them, accepting their goodness and monopolization of mental and visual reality, unaware of their source or of alternative mental spaces.

According to Debord, "the spectacle is the bad dream of a modern society in chains and ultimately expresses nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the

guardian of that sleep” (n.d., p. 12). *The Matrix* (1999) is a contemporary rendition of Plato’s cave (Irwin, 2002/2005; Žižek, 1992/2008), and it closely corresponds to Debord’s theory. In this film, a machine civilization has enslaved the bodies of humans within individualized pods in order to use them as a fuel source. While the machines drain their bodies, their minds are immersed within a virtual world that prevents them from seeing the truth: they are sleeping automaton slaves, and the world is actually a desolate and charred landscape.

Plato is committed to a politics of spiritual liberation. He wants people to set themselves free from the slavery of the cave and commune in the divine sunlight. Like Hegel, he believes that the human spirit develops through an antagonistic struggle to overcome sense-perception. Plato’s narrative reveals an intimate relationship between political idealism and horror. The philosopher is fully illuminated by the Good only after he or she has broken free from the enslavement of the cave, and made the long, arduous journey into the divine sunlight. Illuminated depth of vision requires its opposite: the shallow surface of the cave mentality (Mitchell, 2006). One would not exist without the other. (In a certain respect – from the viewpoint of abstract metaphysics – there is no Good or Evil in Plato’s account, only the cosmic interplay of opposites.). Only those who have been liberated, or who have at least begun the journey out of the cave, can see the horrific nature of the human condition, and thus grasp the necessity of self-examination and collective transformation. But those who see the monstrosity of our situation – like Socrates – are likely to be mistaken for a monster and killed.

The liberator, who bears a strong resemblance to Socrates, is Plato’s hero. The Good has exculpated monstrous disorder from Socrates’s soul, such that he can

accurately see the chains that bind humans. Although not everyone can achieve Socrates' enlightened status – presumably only those who are of the philosophic type can – everyone can acknowledge and orient themselves towards the Good and achieve a just soul. They can do so by taming the beast and the lion, bringing them into a harmonious relationship with each other under the leadership of reason. But whereas the enlightened can rely upon their daemon²⁶ for sure knowledge, the rest of us need the horror genre in order to have some sense of the distinction between divine enlightenment and human slavery.

Conclusion

Plato reverses the traditional relationship between human and monster by arguing that the monster is within the typical human instead of in foreign lands. In his view, human monstrosity is the product of excessive desire, untamed passion, and deficient reason. Reason should rule in the soul and in society. When it does not rule, monstrous excess arises. In order to show the monstrosity of the human, he establishes a psychological model. According to this model, a multi-headed beast (appetite) and an untamed lion (spirit) are contained within a weakened and starving man (reason).

In addition to this general model of monstrosity, Plato presents a degeneration narrative in which specific monsters arise as society and its characters become ever more dissolute. The progressive degeneration of society – and its corresponding character type – proceeds from the appearance of drone-like predators in oligarchy to the emergence of the blind and hungry democratic mass to the rise of the cannibal wolf-man. Each step in

²⁶ The daemon is that which connects the human self to its divine source. Socrates spoke of his daemon as a voice that told him what he should do. Here again, we see the proximity of the monstrous and the divine, and madness and enlightenment.

this process represents a movement away from rational harmony and into dissolution until we reach the secret cannibalistic core of each of the imperfect forms. This narrative cycle is not without modern and contemporary significance. For example, the transition from the mass's pursuit of pleasurable consumption to the sadistic predation of the wolf-man reflects the evolution in the zombie subgenre, from Romero's shopping mall zombies in *Dawn of the Dead* to the killing machines of more recent films like *28 Days Later*.

Plato is an advocate of balance, integration, and harmony. He neither advocates repression nor uncontrolled expression. In the first case, we get the split self of the oligarch; in the second, the uncontrolled consumption of democratic mass and, eventually, the sadism and cannibalism of the wolf-man.

Each of Plato's monsters is deficient in reason. Their minds are clouded by passion and desire. They are incapable of penetrating appearances and constructing progressively more complex insights through dialectical thought, and thus remain trapped within a base level of mental activity. In order to show this state of affairs, Plato constructs his cave scenario, which shows the psycho-political dynamics of human monstrosity.

For Plato, reason is the mode of integration that puts appetite and spirit in their proper places within the soul. Hobbes, from a Platonic perspective, will excessively pursue this solution such that reason itself becomes a monster in the form of Leviathan.

Chapter 4–Hobbesian Monstrosity: The Wolf-Man, Leviathan, and the State of Nature

I have never seen a greater monster or miracle than myself.

-Michel de Montaigne

Introduction

Surveying various definitions of the monster, cultural anthropologist David Gilmore writes, “hybridization...remains a critical element in all analyses, demanding special attention” (2003, p. 7). Like *The Republic*, *Leviathan* is a hybridic text and therefore monstrous. It fuses philosophy and fantasy; rigorous logic and mythic appeal; wolf and man, and then man and machine; criticism of the unruly passions that drive humanity to monstrous behavior, and guidance as to how to achieve a truly human future. From his opening description of society as a giant “artificial man...in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body” (Hobbes, 1962/1966, p. 19), to his concluding discussion of the papal “Kingdom of Darkness,” which “may be compared not unfitly to the kingdom of fairies; that is, to the old wives’ fable in England, concerning ghosts and spirits, and the feats they play in the night” (p. 500), Hobbes infuses his philosophical arguments with sensational aesthetics, drawing the reader into a world of fantastic images. Throughout *Leviathan*, “simile and metaphor are in constant use,” notes David Johnston. “*Leviathan* is a philosophical treatise,” he continues, “but it is also much more. It is an intensely polemical work with literary qualities comparable to those of the most esteemed works in the whole of English literature” (1986, p. 67).

Hobbes himself, like his epic text and its monstrous subjects (the wolf-man and the man-machine), is a hybrid. “A Janus-like theorist who looked backward to the ancients and forward to the moderns” (Robin, 2004, p. 28), he provides a bridge between Plato’s analysis of monstrous subjectivity within the ancient world, and the accounts of modern and contemporary theorists. He is thus a pivotal figure in our canonical horror story of political subjection as it emerges from the ancient world, moves through the modern landscape, and enters into the decomposing terrain of the contemporary cannibal apocalypse.

Hobbes, who is cognizant of the significance and consequences of labels, names his text after an awesome and horrific ancient entity from the sea, compares the individual in his mythic-sounding “state of nature” to the folkloric werewolf, and envisions modern society as a giant “artificial man” directed by the “artificial soul” of sovereignty. Indeed, *Leviathan* is a monster story, as well as a foundational political text. Like Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, Hobbes’ account of the social contract contains the conventions of the genre – its spatial dynamics, subject positions, and linear trajectory. The presence of the elements of horror and monstrosity within the work of another epic theorist once again shows that the monster is a recurring form of rhetoric and character critique within the canon. By examining the monstrous aspects of the contract narrative, I continue to trace the canonical horror story of the political subject as a site of conflict between the beast within, and the mechanical master without.

Hobbes deploys monstrous imagery and rhetoric throughout his career, from the wolf-man of *De Cive* to the gigantic sovereign of *Leviathan*. But he provides little to no

explanation for why he uses these monsters or what they mean.²⁷ Scholars like Johnston (1986) and Skinner (1996) have shown the importance of rhetoric and figurative speech within Hobbes's work, but they have not examined the horrific and monstrous aspects of his social contract theory. This chapter analyzes Hobbes's social contract theory through the lens of horror and monstrosity. I argue that Hobbes creatively deploys the subject positions of the horror genre – monster, victim, and hero – to craft a modern political theory that contains a horrific fairy tale: a giant man-machine contains the predatory wolf of the state of nature to rescue a victimized humanity and uphold civilization.

Utilizing a hybrid methodology – a fusion of science and horror fantasy – Hobbes divides the world into the state of nature,²⁸ a monstrous space, and civil society, a human sanctuary. In Hobbes's fantastical narrative, humans transform into wolf-men²⁹ when they dwell outside of the protective embrace of the sovereign. Individuals in the natural state are imprisoned within a solipsistic form of rationality and forced to become beastly predators in order to defend themselves. Universalizing the subject positions of monster and victim, Hobbes argues that everyone in the state of nature is simultaneously a

²⁷ In chapter 28 of *Leviathan*, "Of Punishments and Rewards," Hobbes provides one brief explanatory statement as to why he calls his sovereign Leviathan. The "pride and other passions" of man "have compelled him to submit himself to government: together with the great power of his governor, whom I compared to *Leviathan*, taking that comparison out of the two last verses of the one-and-fortieth of *Job*; where God having set forth the great power of *Leviathan*, calleth him King of the Proud" (p. 236). Hobbes does not explain why he uses the wolf-men to represent the subject in the state of nature.

²⁸ As Kavka (1986) points out, Hobbes uses "condition of mere nature" or "natural condition" in *Leviathan*, and "state of nature" in *De Cive* (p. 83). I use "state of nature," "natural condition" and "natural state" – a term that is also found within the Hobbes literature – interchangeably.

²⁹ Here I should clarify a terminological issue concerning the terms "wolf-man," "wolf" and "werewolf." Hobbes uses the term "arrant Wolfe," not "wolf-man" or "werewolf." However, as I show below, by citing *Homo Homini Lupus* he alludes to the ancient story of the wolf-man, the same story Plato references in his discussion of the tyrant. Furthermore, Hobbes scholars like Agamben and Rossello use the term "wolf-man" to discuss Hobbes's natural man. The horror genre tends to use the term "werewolf" to refer to the same figure, with the notable exception of *The Wolf-Man* (1941), starring Lon Chaney. For the most part, I use "wolf-man" throughout, thereby maintaining historical and scholarly continuity, but also occasionally use "wolf." The point to grasp is that each term – "wolf," "wolf-man," and "werewolf" – refer to the same transformation narrative and hybrid figure, and may be traced back to the same ancient story.

monstrous predator and a victim-in-waiting. By realizing their ability to reason together, the isolated wolf-men summon the great Leviathan, Hobbes's heroic figure, who saves humanity and upholds civilization by sealing humans within its artificial body.

But Leviathan is a curious kind of hero. In fact, Hobbes's sovereign is a cannibal who has ingested his subjects. Hobbes envisions humans transcending their monstrous nature by incorporating themselves within the mechanical body of Leviathan. He asks his audience to exchange one form of hybridic monstrosity, the ancient wolf-man, for another, the modern man-machine.

The Hobbesian man-machine, as a monstrous image of the modern subject, is a revelatory figure. With a hybrid style, and literary flare, he reshuffles the familiar elements of the world, giving birth to a mechanistic conception of the modern state and its political subjects, warning us, albeit unknowingly, of what is to come. Hobbes's Leviathan specifically reveals the cannibalistic nature of modern sovereignty, and the civil slavery of the modern political subject. Indeed, several political theorists after Hobbes emphasize the mechanical monstrosity of modern subjectivity within a variety of contexts.

A Monstrous Method

Those who operate from a game theoretic perspective within Hobbes studies, such as Gregory S. Kavka (1986) and Jean Hampton (1988), ignore and/or attempt to expunge the irrational and monstrous elements within Hobbes's texts, casting aside an important and significant dimension of his thought. They strip his work down to a rational skeleton, thereby sanitizing it in their efforts to incorporate it within a specific understanding of psychological rationality. Such work is doubtless valuable: it tracks

how Hobbes's definitions and positions evolve over the course of his career; exposes inconsistencies and logical errors in his arguments; clarifies, modifies and extends tenets of his system; and examines the intricacies of his "prisoner's dilemma." However, their analyses also tend to slay, dissect and re-absorb a colorful and contradictory work of political theory/monstrous fantasy.

To take one instance, Kavka argues that Hobbes's ontological "mechanism" is not necessary, from a logical perspective, in order for one to accept his psychological theory of man and his corresponding social contract theory:

Whatever role mechanism plays, however, it is a nonessential one, for the conclusions that Hobbes derives from mechanism...are easily supported by independent considerations. Hence, Hobbesian political theory need not be committed to materialism, mechanism, or even determinism; it can remain neutral with respect to these ontological and metaphysical positions. (p. 11)

Kavka's argument, that one can arrive at Hobbes's conclusions without his mechanistic ontology, may technically be true. However, Hobbes himself does not attempt to convince his readers through reason alone. To view his thought purely from a logical point of view is to ignore the affective and monstrous dynamics in his work. Monstrosity does not function as mere ornamentation within his thinking. His monsters are inextricably entangled with his method, arguments, and conclusions. He provides vivid and provocative depictions of human monstrosity that, for the average reader, would likely overpower or bypass any logical inconsistencies within his positions; indeed, this is one of the rhetorical advantages of having monsters on one's side.

Hobbes saw himself as a monster-slayer. “Early and late in his long writing career,” writes Stillman, “he represents his philosophical life as a battle against monstrous texts;” “he describes his philosophy as a struggle against the ‘phantasms’ of Greek thought—of Aristotelity in particular—and of the monstrous union of ancient metaphysics with Christianity” (1995, p. 791). In Hobbes’s view, metaphor is one of the literary and non-scientific forms of language, and thus produces confusion and disorder. In order to slay “the metaphorical monsters of false systems of knowledge” (Stillman, p. 792), Hobbes conjures his own metaphorical monstrosity: a gigantic man-machine, born of geometric logic. Stillman notes how Hobbes uses the fear of death in order to persuade the reader to accept the “omnipotent logic of *Leviathan*”:

In the larger text, as he moves from metaphor to geometric method, Hobbes...allays existential fears as he creates in the geometrically fashioned Leviathan a sovereign power whose presence brings peace. Sovereign security quiets the fear of death, as the omnipotent logic of *Leviathan* triumphs over the monsters of metaphor. (p. 799)

Therefore “Hobbes’s explicit attack against metaphor stands in contradiction to the constitutive role of figurative speech in his political science” (p. 792).

Is it not odd and intriguing that Hobbes at once passionately opposes metaphor and at the same time persistently and ubiquitously deploys it? This dynamic is not on the radar of game theoretic accounts. Kavka – and those who attempt to uphold the banner of reason against figurative formulations within Hobbes’s system – only attend to the logical pathways and statistical probabilities of his arguments. They do not discuss the constitutive contradiction between Hobbes’s scientific method, on the one hand, and his

mythic monsters, on the other. Scholars like David Johnston (1986) and Quentin Skinner (1996) have taken the rhetorical aspects of Hobbes's work seriously. They have examined his humanist training, his engagement with the Bible, and the various forms of figurative speech that he regularly deploys. However, like the scholars who deploy game theory, they have not considered Hobbes's monsters within the context of his political thought.

Despite his own self-representation as a scientist,³⁰ Hobbes does not limit himself to scientific method. He deploys a hybridic methodology, fusing hypothetical abstraction, geometric logic, primitive emotion, monstrous symbolism and horrific narrative in order to impel the minds of his readers towards his rhetorical conclusion. Hobbes simultaneously operates in the logical and mythic domains, which follow different rules, and speak to different faculties in the human. The Hobbesian state of nature may be justifiably classified as a scientific or economic model of human interaction in the absence of government. But it is also a colorful and fantastic portrait of monstrosity, a mythical and affectively charged narrative landscape inhabited by deadly predators.

As its name suggests, Hobbes's "resolutive-compositive method" consists of decomposing a whole into its constitutive elements (parts and motions), and then recomposing it according to the knowledge gained from the analytical dissolution. By isolating and examining the parts, one comes to understand how they interact – or how they should interact – to form a functional whole. Hobbes imports this method from the natural sciences and applies it to the commonwealth (the state), the object with which he is concerned in his political treatises.

³⁰ For a discussion of this theme see Sorell (1988/1999).

As a first step, Hobbes dissolves the state, applying the acid bath of speculative anthropology. It may not be possible or desirable to conduct a literal political experiment upon the state, but one may do so safely in the mind. “Hobbes’s plan,” writes Kavka, “is to break the commonwealth up into its constituent elements, human individuals, and examine the operations and interactions of these elements in the absence of the commonwealth, that is, in the state of nature” (1986, p. 83). By imagining an inhospitable situation, Hobbes hopes to steer humanity clear of the real terrors of life without his version of sovereignty.

According to Tricaud, the state of nature is “a picture that has something unreal about it,” or “an artificial representation” (1988/1999, p. 110). Hobbes asks us to imagine “the relations between men, such as they would be *if* their behavior were not controlled by a political organization based on contracts” (p. 110). Hobbes believes that the state is a lynchpin that holds all forms of sociality in place. Removing it from the picture means eliminating “any contractual arrangements and political institutions,” “all mutual fondness,” “every kind of affective tie or community feeling,” as well as those individuals who are “unable to kill, either for psychological or physical reasons” (Tricaud, p. 110). By “isolating certain fundamental and eternal features of human behavior” (p. 111) – and then calculating patterns of interaction upon the basis of those features – Hobbes simplifies and abstracts from reality (as it is commonly conceived) in order to generate his (somewhat) unreal image. According to Tricaud, “Hobbes himself was quite aware of these methodological simplifications” (p. 110).³¹ Although the state of nature is a picture that is, at least in part, unreal, this

³¹ As proof Tricaud cites the passage in *De Cive* where Hobbes compares his imaginary construction of natural men to the generation of mushrooms. In this passage, Hobbes asks us to “consider men as if but

does not mean (this must be strongly emphasized) that it has no scientific value: it is a *model* (taking the word in such sense as physicists and economists make use of), whose function is not to *reproduce* the true condition of mankind, but to *illuminate* it. (p. 110)

Hobbes's procedure results in a picture or model that aims to shed light upon the human condition; to negate illusion, and replace it with an accurate understanding of human psychology that will result in rational political behavior.

Hobbes suffuses his scientific model with monstrosity. He posits “an allegorical connection between the beast and the state of nature, and the human and the civil state” (Rossello, 2012, p. 273). He represents the world as divided between humanity and monstrosity according to a binary logic that appears to be exactly the same as that which structures the horror genre. This polarization is rooted in the two concepts around which his social contract theory revolves: the “state of nature” and “civil society.” The state of nature concept corresponds to the classic attributes of monstrosity, whereas civil society corresponds to those that are typically associated with humanity. Thus these concepts may be seen as the political-theoretical corollary or expression of the binary logic of the monster genre, or the appearance of the basic categories of horror within a political theory.

“In a passage that has haunted generations of readers” (Stillman, 1995, p. 805), Hobbes famously describes the state of nature as a place without industry or culture. In the natural condition there is

even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other (as cited in Tricaud, 1988/1999, p. 111). “Nothing could show more clearly,” Tricaud argues, “that...the notion of a state of nature is a conceptual artefact” (p 111).

no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. (Hobbes, 1962/1966, p. 100)

“Hobbes’s account,” writes Stillman, “forms a brilliant parody of the golden age topos of classical pastoral” in which “a literary image is erased in order to make room for what is simultaneously a rationally conceived image of life in the state of nature and an affectively charged depiction of primitive existence” (p. 805).

Hobbes arouses the primitive fear of bestial predation – of being consumed – by painting a horrific portrait of the natural state. He then seeks to use the fear that his thought experiment arouses as a catalyst for the creation of a civilized order, for the construction of a more perfect self. “Though Hobbes understood fear to be a reaction to real danger in the world, he also appreciated its theatrical qualities,” notes Corey Robin (2004, p. 33). “Political fear depended upon illusion, where danger was magnified, even exaggerated, by the state” (Robin, p. 33). In his social contract narrative, Hobbes deploys fear in a theatrical manner in order to move individuals away from the brutish natural state – with its unending disagreements, distrust, and violent conflicts – and into the arms of Leviathan. For Hobbes, “fear does not betray the individual; it is his completion. It is not the antithesis of civilization but its fulfillment” (Robin, p. 32). Indeed, fear is a humanizing force in Hobbes’s account, that which impels the individual to leave the wolfishness of the state of nature and become the civilized man-machine.

Of course, Hobbes is not the only political theorist who has conducted a thought experiment in which political subjects are abstracted from their present reality and

inserted within an imaginary pre-societal context in order to support specific political conclusions. After Hobbes's imaginative journey into societal dissolution, political theory would never be the same: it "became obligatory for later authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when writing on similar topics, to begin their accounts from their version of the state of nature" (Tricaud, 1988/1999, p. 107). Locke, Rousseau, Rawls and Nozick, amongst others, have famously contributed to this tradition. Modern political thought thus became enthralled by a method that fused reasoned argumentation with imaginary speculation and mythic imagery; that appealed to both the rational and imaginative faculties in order to establish and/or challenge fundamental political distinctions: savage versus civilized; natural versus artificial; pre-political versus political; and human versus monstrous.

However, few, if any, such scenarios have matched the dystopian depths to which Hobbes's fancy takes us. Others do not imagine a horrific condition in which humans behave like savage beasts. Thinkers like Locke, Rousseau, and Rawls soften the monstrous edges of Hobbes's natural state, and even, at times, gesture towards the utopian aspirations of humanity. (Hobbes's utopian inclinations, in contrast, are exclusively reserved for his conception of civil society, in which he equates humanization with mechanization.). Locke, for example, believes there is a thoroughly social – and communal – man prior to the institution of government. For Locke, humans in the state of nature may, through their united consent, form a society. In *The Second Treatise of Government*, he argues that political society is constituted by

nothing but the consent of any number of freemen capable of a majority to unite and incorporate into such a society. And this is that, and that only, which did or could give beginning to any lawful government in the world. (2002, p. 45)

Locke does speak of individuals who are “dangerous and noxious creatures,” which “may be treated as beasts of prey” (p. 8). But these persons are in the minority. Furthermore, no gigantic monstrous figure is needed to hold individuals in awe and compel them to leave their wolfish ways. And to take a more recent example, Rawls (1999), in *A Theory of Justice*, posits the “original position.” He asks readers to imagine themselves into a pre-political situation in which they are behind a “veil of ignorance.” In this position, one cannot know what his or her life will look like once society is formed. Rawls’s disembodied subjects reason their way into a social contract from this perspective. His political thought experiment is thus an imaginary scenario constructed out of abstractions, but it contains no horror or savagery.

Hobbes’s state of nature is more akin to Plato’s Cave than it is to Rawls’s original position, or to the natural states of Locke and Rousseau. Like Plato’s cave, Hobbes’s natural state was produced through a fusion of scientific methodology (the dialectic in Plato’s case; the resolute-compositive method in Hobbes’s) and horrific imagination. Plato and Hobbes both divide the world into a space of monstrous darkness (the cave; the natural state) and one of humanized light (the sunlit world above the cave; civil society). Both are epistemological models of human monstrosity (instinctual and intellectual) that aim to illuminate and transform that condition. Hobbes, like Plato, thus uses the binaries of the monster canon to elaborate his diagnostic claims about the human condition, and to support his prescriptive arguments for a well-ordered society.

With the horrific aspects of his thought in view, Hobbes resembles many an author and rhetorician of horror, especially those who attempt to use the monster as an instrument of fearful pedagogy.³² Both use the tropes of fantasy horror to capture the attention of their audiences, isolate and examine monstrous attributes, and police the borders of desirable or acceptable behavior. Although authors of horror narratives do not conceive of their craft as science, they engage in a process that parallels Hobbes's. They replace a standard portrait of humanity with a monstrous one – whether by taking humans out of society and placing them into an external horrific space (e.g., *The island of Dr. Moreau*), or by imagining the breakdown of political order and the eruption of monstrosity from within (e.g., *Dawn of the Dead*) – and then depict a horrific model of human interaction in the absence of government. Both Hobbes and Romero specifically imagine cannibals emerging as civilization collapses.

The State of Nature

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes defines the state of nature as “the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe” (1962/1966, p. 100). Without the awe-inspiring power of a strong sovereign entity, humans fall into a state of endless anxiety and misery. For Hobbes, the state of nature, the absence of government, is coterminous with the state of war, “and such a war,” he writes, “as is of every man, against every man (p. 100): *bellum omnium contra omnes* (“the war of all against all”). Although individuals in the state of nature are not always engaged in physical combat, they are subject to the ever-present potential for violent conflict. Here it is important to note that Hobbes's deployment of monstrosity need not necessarily align with what the elaborate

³² For a discussion of the way in which the monster has been used throughout history as an instrument of fear-based pedagogy and construction of the citizen, see Ingebretsen (1998).

calculations of game theoretic models suggest the natural state will be like. His depictions of predation leave little doubt that the state of nature is violent and monstrous.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes references the “savage people” of America in response to those who doubt the reality of such a state. He admits that the natural condition “was never generally so, over all the world,” but also claims that “there are many places” where this condition does now exist (1962/1966, p. 101). “For the savage people in many places of America, except the government of small families, the concord whereof dependeth on natural lust, have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner... (p. 101). The state of war may not appear everywhere and at every time, but it does exist. If you doubt this fact, Hobbes tells his European audience, think of the American savages, those monstrous inhabitants of the New World.

“Native Americans are Hobbes’s recurrent example of a natural condition whose savagery led Carl Schmitt, three centuries later, to refer to ‘a domain of werewolves,’” notes Rossello (2012, p. 260). Hobbes, like many of his contemporaries, here participates in the European projection of monstrosity upon the New World. During the 17th century, America is variously depicted within the European imagination as a land of savagery, hyper-sexuality, devil-worship, and cannibalism (Rogin, 1988; Wood, 2003; Poole, 2011). This process of monstrous projection upon America assumes a view of the world in which monstrous beings dwell in a distant horrific space (America) that is far removed from the civilized human world (Europe).³³ This conception of global space is structured

³³ Interestingly, this process has continued through to the present moment within European philosophy. See *Reconstructing America*, in which James W. Ceaser examines the work of European intellectuals “who have made the very name ‘America’ a symbol for that which is grotesque, obscene, monstrous, stultifying, stunted, leveling, deadening, deracinating, deforming, rootless, uncultured, and—always in quotation marks—‘free’” (1997, p. 1). He traces this process from “the thesis of American degeneracy... which dominated advanced scientific thinking in Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century” (p. 19) to the work of contemporary thinkers like Heidegger and Baudrillard. While Ceaser is right to expose the

according to a standard spatial device of the monster genre: monstrous beings live beyond the borders of the known world.

However, Hobbes also believes that the citizens of England have recently inhabited the state of nature. He informs us in chapter 13 of *Leviathan* that “it may be perceived what manner of life there would be, where there were no common power to fear; by the manner of life, which men that have formerly lived under a peaceful government, use to degenerate into, in a civil war” (1962/1966, p. 101). If you want to know what the state of nature is like, recall your memories of civil war. In this respect, we should understand the state of nature as a reference to the wars that divided England from 1642 to 1651 (the year in which *Leviathan* was published), as well as an indication of the possibility for relapse into such a condition.

In chapter 8 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes reveals his fear of the revolutionary multitude, those who “are possessed of an opinion of being inspired” (1962/1966, p. 63), those who would bring society into another civil war. These individuals are moved to such strange acts as the haunting of graves by the passion of melancholy: “Dejection subjects a man to causeless fears; which is a madness commonly called melancholy, apparent also in divers manners; as in haunting of solitudes and graves; in superstitious behaviour; and in fearing, some one, some another particular thing” (p. 63). The “singular passions” of such individuals “are parts of the seditious roaring of a troubled nation” (p. 64). Moved by “the rage of the whole multitude,” “they will clamour, fight against, and destroy those, by whom all their lifetime before, they have been protected, and secured from injury” (p.

over-generalizations and monstrous projections of European philosophers with respect to America, he pays no attention to the wealth of scholarship – from Americans as well as Europeans – that examines the truly monstrous and deadening nature of the American power structure. Zombieism is, in large part, a phenomenon in which Americans examine and embrace their own monstrous nature, which includes many of the attributes that Ceaser argues are the product of uninformed European philosophizing.

64). Although this monstrous passion may be invisible within the individual, that of “the whole multitude is visible enough” (p. 63). Through this monstrous rhetoric and imagery, Hobbes thus seeks to warn his contemporaries against transforming into a beastly mass that will, like the monster of horror narratives, dissolve civil society into lawless anarchy.

Stillman (1995) argues that “the shadow of the civil wars passes regularly over the *Leviathan* (p. 798), and that it is “a text designed to remedy the cultural chaos of England’s civil war era” (p. 797). “In Hobbes’s estimation,” Stillman writes, “England’s wars brought a dissolution of authority at every level of culture, from the moral to the religious, from the intellectual order to the social order. Touch one nerve, and the whole of the body politic shakes” (pp. 797-798). Such instability and insecurity called for heroic stabilization. Thus Hobbes summoned his indomitable Leviathan, a figure that would put an end to the violent motions of the state of war, enforce order, and symmetrically unite a fractious people.

Although Hobbes undoubtedly had the English Civil War on his mind as he wrote *Leviathan*, he had already formulated his basic political arguments in *The Elements of Law*, which was published prior to the outbreak of war in 1640. This suggests that while the state of nature was influenced by historical events, it was ultimately, in Hobbes’s mind, an a-temporal model of human monstrosity. Indeed, scholars understand the state of nature as a model that captures an ever-present possibility, not as an empirical descriptor (Tricaud, 1988/1999, p. 111; Agamben, 1998, p. 36; Robin, 2004, p. 32).³⁴ In other words, the natural state does not necessarily or essentially refer to an actual time or

³⁴ “The word ‘state’ is somewhat misleading,” argues Tricaud. It would have been more proper to speak of a mere risk, an abstract possibility...as a representation that need not be assigned to any definite moment in historical or prehistoric times” (p. 111).

place when humans roamed the woods or engaged in especially bloody conflict, as much as it signifies an ever-present potential for state failure, and the miseries that follow. This potential for collapse is always present, lurking within civilization, waiting to plunge humanity into darkness.

The state of nature essentially concerns “the relations between men” (Tricaud, p. 110). It therefore not only applies to those who live outside of a state, but also to the citizens of one state in relation to the citizens of another state. Those who live within the borders of a commonwealth exist in a state of war – of potential, if not actual, conflict – in relation to everyone outside of that territory, for there is no global sovereign. In other words, individuals from distinct sovereign bodies relate to each other as enemies in a state of war.³⁵

The absence of a common sovereign entity gives rise to a condition in which individuals transmogrify into beastly predators. By applying this conception to the world, we may construct a map of monstrosity, one that entails a much more sophisticated articulation of space than the typical horror narrative. The contours of this map follow the lines of political geography. The international relations amongst sovereign states construct a world in which civil society and the state of nature simultaneously exist within the same physical locations and in respect to the very same individuals, depending upon which individual and political relationships one focuses upon.

Although one may apply Hobbes’s model to actual geographical space – and Hobbes himself, at times, does this – we should not conflate actual geographical space

³⁵ Carl Schmitt (1996/2007) will elaborate upon this idea in *The Concept of the Political*. Politics, for Schmitt, is defined by the “friend-enemy” distinction, which is drawn by the sovereign. However, the enemy is not necessarily a monster within Schmitt’s framework.

with mythic space, which are related but distinct. The natural state, as a picture or image, concerns the timeless no-place of fantasy and myth. The product of extension within the medium of thought and imagination, the natural state allows Hobbes to paint a monstrous portrait of human nature. At times, geographical space and mythic space are closely linked in Hobbes's work, such as when he speaks of the American savages or the Roman imperialists. From this perspective, the Hobbesian paradigm generates a layered fusion of geographical space and the imaginary spatiality of monstrosity.

The state of nature, as a monstrous mirror, thus reflects the beastly nature of the human, what we are forced to become when we live without law, outside of the protective embrace of a sovereign entity. As prophetic revelation, it reveals what humans have been and will become at particularly monstrous moments of historical transformation.

The Subject Positions of the Social Contract

Hobbes's narrative utilizes what Carol Clover calls "horror's cast of characters—or, more properly, its cast of functions or subject positions" (1992, p. 12). The subject positions of horror are monster, victim and hero. These "are understood to preexist and constitute character" within horror narratives (p. 12). Hobbes utilizes these positions, but in a manner that is somewhat atypical.

In the standard horror narrative, separate individuals/entities, with different qualities and functions, often perform these roles. Normally, the masculine hero rescues a victimized woman/civilization from a non-human beast, a supernatural entity, or a human-animal hybrid. For instance, in *Dracula*, Dracula is the cannibalistic and lustful monster; Lucy Harker, the female victim; and Van Helsing, the knowledgeable and brave

hero. However, the horror film *Carrie* (1976; 2002; 2013), based upon the book of the same name by Stephen King, presents an interesting exception to this rule. The girl in the title role inhabits the position of victim, monster and hero variously throughout the story.

As Clover explains,

like Samson, Carrie is all three in turn. Throughout most of the movie she is the victim of monstrous schoolmates and a monstrous mother, but when, at the end, she turns the tables, she herself becomes a kind of monstrous hero...monster insofar as she has herself become excessive, demonic. (p. 4)

A similar overlap in function is present within Hobbes's social contract narrative; the individual inhabits the subject positions of monster, victim and hero within different relationships, and at different points, of his narrative. In the state of nature, everyone is simultaneously monster and victim. In civil society, individuals become parts of the heroic sovereign, and yet they still exist in a state of war in relation to the citizens of other sovereign powers (and thus inhabit the monster and victim positions).

The Monster

Critically, Hobbes, like my other monster theorists, utilizes his horrific heuristic to interrogate the monstrous nature of his fellow citizens. He orients his arguments towards the proximate present, aiming to impress upon the minds of his readers the fact that the natural condition may appear at any time within their midst. Although he references the savages of America in *Leviathan*, he does not dwell upon their example. Their savagery might best demonstrate, in Hobbes's view, the brutishness to which humanity can descend. But they function primarily as a provocative mirror of European savagery, as a reflection of what anyone may become in the state of nature.

In his discussion of Hobbes's famous natural state passage within *Leviathan* (cited above), Stillman notes that "what at first appears a skillful parody of a literary topos, becomes, as the passage unfolds, a description of the reader's world itself—and a fearsome world it is" (1995, p. 806). Indeed, Hobbes is primarily concerned with rendering the horrific monstrosity of his fellow citizens. He tells a story of the monster within, of the evil that lurks within the light of his own campfire. Contradicting long-standing philosophical and religious views of the (normal, European) human as superior to the beast, he argues that all humans, even Western Europeans, are monsters under certain conditions. This is why Hobbes himself was considered a monster by several of his contemporaries, and why *Leviathan* was demonized and burned.

The horror of the natural state centers upon Hobbes's monster, the wolf-man. We first encounter this figure in the Epistle Dedicatory introduction to *De Cive*, where Hobbes cites the ancient adage *Homo Homini Lupus* ("Man is a Wolf to Man") while reflecting upon the beastly nature of the human. After noting the popular Roman saying, voiced by Marcus Porcius Cato, "that Kings should be classed as predatory animals," Hobbes asks "but what sort of animal was the Roman people? By the agency of citizens who took the names of *Africanus*, *Asiaticus*, *Macedonicus*, *Achaicus* and so on from the nations they had robbed, that people plundered nearly all the world" (p. 3). Recalling Pontius Telesinus, leader of the Samnites, who fought against the Roman domination of Italy in the Battle of the Colline Gate of 82 BC, Hobbes writes:

As he reviewed the ranks of his army in the battle against *Sulla*³⁶ ...he cried that Rome itself must be demolished and destroyed, remarking that there would never

³⁶ Lucius Cornelius Sulla Felix was a Roman general and politician.

be an end to *Wolves* preying upon the liberty of Italy, unless the forest in which they took refuge was cut down. (p. 3)

Acknowledging the beastly predation of both the kings and the peoples of Rome, Hobbes argues that “the words of *Pontius Telesinus* are no less wise than *Cato’s*” (p. 3). “The deeds and sayings of the Greeks and Romans have been commended to History not by Reason but by their grandeur and often by that very wolf-like element which men deplore in each other” (p. 4).

Hobbes cites *Homo Homini Lupus*, first attributed to the Roman playwright Titus Maccius Plautus, along with *Homo Homini Deus* (“Man is a God to Man”), which Schmitt links to Francis Bacon.³⁷ For Hobbes, the two adages reflect the dualistic potential of humanity:

There are two maxims which are surely both true: *Man is a God to man*, and *Man is a wolf to Man*. The former is true of the relations of citizens with each other, the latter of relations between commonwealths. (pp. 3-4)

Man is god-like as citizen, within civil society, amongst those who have submitted to, and receive protection from, the same sovereign. But in relation to those who exist outside of one’s own civil society, man exhibits “the predatory nature of beasts” (1998, p. 4). The Roman people may have, in certain respects, acted with civility towards each other, but in relation to others, they acted like a beastly and duplicitous mass predator. Hobbes specifically links the wolf to the imperial predation of the Romans, but beastly behavior will appear within any relationships that exist outside of the protective embrace

³⁷ “It is astonishing that Hobbes appropriated as a characteristic of the condition of peace brought about by the police the formula of Francis Bacon of Verulam by speaking of man becoming a god to man, *homo homini deus*, whereas in the state of nature man was wolf to man, *homo homini lupus*” (Schmitt, 1938/2008, p. 31).

of a singular sovereign entity. Of course, not every individual or group will manifest the same degree of barbarity as that of the Romans; but the potential for such behavior will always be there.

The human is tortuously positioned between the state of nature and civil society, between the beastly and the divine, between wolf and god. But this conflict can be resolved, at least within the domestic sphere, if we submit to Leviathan, that mortal god who can deliver us from the predation of the state of nature. Hobbes thus introduces the wolf-man alongside the god-man,³⁸ using these mythic figures to designate the disparate potentials of the human being, and to persuade his audience to opt for his sovereign solution, so that they might collectively embody their god-like potential, instead of fall victim to the wolf within.

Plautus, who wrote around 200 B.C. (two centuries after Plato),³⁹ is frequently singled out as the originator of *Homo Homini Lupus*. In act 2, scene 4 of his comic play *Asinaria* (“*The One about the Asses*”), a character states “lupus est homo homini, non homo, quom quails sit non novit,” which translates as, “a man’s a wolf, not a man... –to a man who don’t know what he’s like” (2008, p. 53).⁴⁰ According to Henderson, this means “a stranger may as well be a wolf” (p. 144). More philosophically, it signifies “humanity estranged” (p. xi). Plautus’s original formulation thus uses the symbol of the wolf to convey a pessimistic, suspicious notion of human nature.

³⁸ Jesus, the God-Man of Christianity, is a hybrid figure, and therefore just as monstrous as the wolf-man. Zizek and theologian John Milbank explore this theme in *The Monstrosity of Christ* (2009).

³⁹ According to Lee, Plato wrote the *Republic* somewhere around 375 B.C. (1987, p.19).

⁴⁰ John Henderson (2008) provides some useful historical and thematic context for *Asinaria*: “*The One about the Asses* is full of Rome: slavery and sex slavery; money and family structure; masculinity and social standing; senility and partying; jokes, lies, and idiocy. This is Latin behaving badly, and Plautus isn’t a pushover to read” (p. vii).

Although the phrase itself may derive from Plautus, its mythic roots stretch further back into history. Plato, in Chapter IX of *The Republic*, compares his tyrant to the wolf-man. He specifically recalls the “story about the shrine of Zeus Lykæus in Arcadia” in which “the man who tastes a single piece of human flesh, mixed in with the rest of the sacrifice, is fated to become a wolf” (565d-e). According to Plato, the transmogrification of the popular democratic leader into the predatory tyrant approximates this ancient wolf-man transformation narrative. Within the context of his degeneration narrative, the tyrant wolf-man – an insane, lustful, cannibal – embodies the ultimate form of human barbarity.

Approximately two hundred years later, Plautus cited the same transformation narrative in *Amphitryon*. The title character of this play exclaims:

What wondrous things have I seen since I arrived from abroad! Why, it's true, surely, what was once heard tell of, how that men of Attica were transformed in Arcadia, and remained as savage wild beasts, and were not ever afterwards known unto their parents. (1852, pp. 49-50)

Riley comments upon Plautus's reference: “He alludes to a story among the ancients, that certain people of Arcadia were transformed for a certain time into wolves: they were called “Lycanthropi,” or “Wolf-men.” Pliny the Elder mentions them in his Eighth Book” (p. 50). Thus the symbolic and mythological core of *Homo Homini Lupus* – the wolf-man and its transformation narrative – pre-dates even *The Republic*, and informs both Plato's tyrant and Hobbes's natural man. Significantly, both Plato and Hobbes choose the wolf-man figure to represent the essence of human monstrosity.⁴¹

⁴¹ Although Plato uses different monstrous figures in order to represent the corruption of the various character types, the underlying essence of these monsters is embodied by the wolf-man.

In his discussion of *Homo Homini Lupus* Rossello (2012) notes, “scholars take this sentence... to illustrate the brutish, anarchical condition of man in the natural state” (p. 255). In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud (1989/1995) cites Plautus’s adage after arguing that humans are ruthless and predatory creatures.⁴² Similarly, John Herman Randall (1919), in *The Essence of Democracy*, links Plautus’s phrase to the predatory behavior that arises from human selfishness:

Two thousand years ago Plautus said, “man to man is a wolf.” Even if he has not so wide a range now as formerly, the wolf of selfishness still commits his ravages in every community. ‘Every man for himself,’ is still the working motto of our individualistic civilization. (p. 57)

Thus the basic significance of *Homo Homini Lupus* – and the wolf-man figure on which it is based – appears to have remained the same over time. Indeed, its longevity and universal appeal arise from the simple, direct, and powerful metaphor of wolfish predation.

Like Plautus, Hobbes does not hold a sanguine view of human nature. Schmitt (1938/2008) argues that Hobbes

understood that man is more ‘asocial’ than an animal, full of anguish and worry about the future, driven not only by present but also by potential hunger...he is at all times determined and ready to trample on reason and logic in order to secure for himself immediate, momentary advantage. (p. 36)

⁴² Critiquing the Christian commandments “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” and “Love thine enemies,” Freud argues humans are dangerous “creatures,” and that one’s neighbor is thus “someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo homini lupus*” (p. 749).

Consequently, in Hobbes's natural state there is no majority of decent and sociable individuals capable of generating society without governmental compulsion, as we find in Locke's state of nature. Nor does Hobbes's natural man have anything resembling the pity that Rousseau depicts in his *Discourse on Inequality*. While not all scholars share a thoroughly bleak assessment of Hobbes's view of human nature,⁴³ it is difficult to overlook the fact that he provides much textual evidence for viewing the self as violent and monstrous within the natural state.

Hobbes is not entirely consistent in respect to the causes of monstrosity, neither within the context of the various arguments of *Leviathan*, nor when one compares that text to earlier renditions of the natural state. Schmitt's passage brings to mind Hobbes's Jansenist portrait of the inner wickedness of man in *De Cive*, where Hobbes claims that "all men in the state of nature have a desire and will to hurt" (as cited in Tricaud, 1988/1999, p. 111). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes seems to present a similar view: "I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death" (1962/1966, p. 80). However, *Leviathan* tends to locate the cause of monstrosity in the external circumstances of the natural state, instead of in the inner wickedness of human nature (Tricaud, p. 121). Natural equality – the fact that everyone is more or less equal in their ability to kill and their susceptibility to harm – leads to conflict over the objects of desire, which produces war (Hobbes, 1962/1966, pp. 98-99). Similarly, Hampton (1988) argues that Hobbes presents two accounts of conflict. One locates the cause of conflict in disruptive passions like vainglory. The other views the limiting rationality of the prisoner's dilemma as the culprit.

⁴³ For instance, David Van Mill (2001) discusses Hobbes's notion of the "generous souls" whom make civility and societal improvement possible.

Even in more optimistic renditions of Hobbes's natural state, the individual is trapped within monstrous circumstances. Like Plato's cave-dweller, Hobbes's natural man is a prisoner. The latter is imprisoned within a suspicious, individualistic logic that prevents sociality and demands pre-emptive predation. While some may take pleasure in preying upon others – Kavka (1986) terms these individuals “dominators” (p. 97) – the majority will be forced into becoming beast-like by the external circumstances of the natural state. In the absence of a sovereign power, the individualistic rationality of the prisoner's dilemma forces individuals to resort to predatory behavior out of self-defense. Solipsistic reasoning brings out the wolf in man, causing the powerful self-centered passions to splinter humanity into isolated brutes.

Given the natural equality of humans, everyone is capable of great deceit and destruction. In the natural state, one lacks certain knowledge of the motivations and plans of others, but knows that they are capable of monstrous acts. For Hobbes, not only the stranger or unknown other is potentially monstrous and therefore unworthy of trust. Anyone may turn out to be a monster (and already is a monster by virtue of the space they inhabit). There is a wolf lurking within everyone, and anyone at anytime may prey upon anyone else. This is why individuals cannot afford to trust each other, despite good reasons for doing so.

The wolf-man haunts even those who dwell within the same city. To those who doubt the reality of their own monstrosity, Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, writes:

Let him therefore consider with himself, when taking a journey, he arms himself...when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house he

locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws, and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him. (1962/1966, pp. 100-101)

For Hobbes, beastliness is an ever-present threat, even amongst those who have been pacified by a sovereign. Although monstrosity is more or less contained within civil society, it may erupt and proliferate at any moment, disintegrating the reasoned artificial construct of humanity, throwing individuals into the anarchy and violence of civil war.

Of course, suspicion of the other – the perception of their monstrosity – turns one into a monster. Everyone must be prepared to assume the form of the wolf out of self-defense. Such is the dilemma of the imprisoned. Instead of cooperating, humanity plays a game of collective self-victimization. Like Romero's zombie apocalypse, Hobbes's state of nature, in its darkest formulation, is a vision of a distrustful and fragmented humanity cannibalizing itself.

Paranoia about the invisible monster lurking within the seemingly normal human informs several types of horror fiction, including the transformation narratives that revolve around figures like the wolf-man, the vampire, and the zombie, as well as occult possession narratives like *The Exorcist*. This theme is also found in films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which envisions American citizens becoming a mass of automaton conformists, and *The Shining*, which depicts a failed writer and family man transforming into a psycho-killer. Indeed, many of the greatest horror stories revolve around the appearance of the otherwise invisible monster within those who are familiar and seemingly well-known, not the stranger or other. The zombie, like the wolf-man, represents a full-blown case of the monster appearing within the familiar selves of the domestic social order.

To this day, *Homo Homini Lupus* “remains one of the most well-known dicta in the tradition of political theory (Rossello, 2012, p. 255). In large part, this is due to the reception and popular construction of Hobbes as a theorist with dark forebodings about human nature. His political thought – and, more specifically, his state of nature concept – is shrouded in the mythic aura of the cannibal wolf. Indeed, whether one stresses inner wickedness or outer circumstances, the predatory passions or rational imprisonment, one is left with the same monstrous behavior in his natural state.

The Victim

Discussing the historic comparison, since Freud, of the horror narrative and the dream, Clover notes, “and just as attacker and attacked are expressions of the same self in nightmares, so they are expressions of the same viewer in horror film. We are both Red Riding Hood *and* the Wolf; the force of the experience, in horror, comes from ‘knowing’ both sides of the story” (1992, p. 12). Hobbes’s state of nature, like a “low-mythic” nightmare, draws us in by envisioning “both sides of the story.” In the state of nature, the roles of monster and victim are, for the most part, performed by the same persons. At one time, the individual is a monstrous aggressor; at another, the victim of invasion.

The victim in Hobbes’s narrative is humanity and civilization as a whole. To posit humanity/civilization as a collective victim of the monster is thoroughly generic. For example, Grendel and Dracula present threats to the respective human communities within which they appear. American horror films in which the monster threatens apocalypse, beginning with the giant creature films of the 1950s like *Them!* and *The Beginning of the End*, and continuing with 1960s films like *The Birds* and *The Last Man on Earth* and *Night of the Living Dead*, universalize this threat to the population of a

country, or even to the entire human race. However, these films personalize the larger conflict, focusing upon a few victimized individuals. Hobbes does not personalize his grand conflict between monstrosity and humanity by presenting the story of a few individuals.

Hobbes casts humanity as both passive victim and monstrous perpetrator, which is not a generic move. Everyone in the natural state is simultaneously a deadly monster and a fearful victim-in-waiting. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes depicts this outcome as a product of natural equality. He begins his account of the natural condition in Chapter 13 by establishing the following causal chain: “*Men by nature equal*” → “*From equality proceeds diffidence*” → “*From diffidence war*” (1962/1966, pp. 98-99). “The difference between man, and man, is not so considerable,” Hobbes writes, “as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest...” (p. 98). He continues:

And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end, which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only, endeavour to destroy, or subude one another. (pp. 98-99)

Natural equality is thus a monstrous force that threatens to make life a living hell, and even to end it. A form of monstrous equality is also present in each of my other theorist’s work.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For Tocqueville, equality in democratic society threatens to slay liberty by putting it to sleep through majority tyranny. Plato, for his part, is also concerned with the destruction of necessary distinctions, which becomes so prevalent within democracy. In Romero’s films the zombie mass is, amongst other things, a vision of the degeneration of equality into horrific mass sameness.

In Hobbes's narrative the dramatic confrontation between human and monster is set within the psyche of every single individual. As a human-beast hybrid, natural man is divided into attacker and attacked, predator and prey. Trapped within a form of isolating, conflict-producing logic, the wolf-man is a tragic and pitiful figure. As wolf, it preys upon humans. As human, it struggles to find a solution to its schizophrenic oscillation. It is violently constructed and driven by forces (internal and external) that are out of its control. Thus the wolf-man – for Hobbes, and for the werewolf narrative more generally – is both monster and victim.

Alyson Cole's (2006) analysis of "anti-victimism" within contemporary American political discourse sheds an interesting light upon Hobbes's deployment of the victim subject position. According to the anti-victimist viewpoint, which conservatives regularly assume, it is shameful and harmful to play the victim. "Victim talk is indeed omnipresent, but American political discourse is dominated not by claims of victimization as much as by claims against victims," notes Cole (p. 2). While "on the surface, American society seems ever more responsive to suffering" (p. 1), in reality "victimhood has been vilified" (p. 2). Conservative critics of victimism have enacted a "campaign against victims" (p. 3), which depicts victims as weak, passive, and effeminate, but sometimes also "as manipulative, aggressive, and even criminal...as actual or potential victimizers, a danger to themselves and society" (p. 3). In the eyes of the anti-victimist, those who cry victim are a "pervasive threat" that must be restrained (p. 4).

In terms of the subject positions of horror, anti-victimists perceive victimhood as a monstrous villain that must be contained. One would therefore assume that they place

themselves in the position of the hero defending the social order from the villainous victimists. However, they “become in effect practitioners of victim politics by devising and promoting new groups of victims” (Cole, 2006, p. 4). They “reify and exalt the very status they revile” (p. 5). They victimize themselves by framing victims as monstrous villains. This framing allows them to disown victimhood while playing the victim.

In contrast, Hobbes advocates a quite different and more straightforward attitude towards victimhood. In the state of nature, everyone perpetuates and experiences victimization. While “anti-victimists conceive of almost any form of collectivism as inherently victimist, since it undermines individual autonomy by encouraging a profound dependency on the group or the state” (Cole, 2006, p. 6), Hobbes embraces a collective response to victimization. He takes the fear of suffering as a common point of reference, as the affective foundation of modern subjectivity and sovereignty. “Fear had to be thought of as the touchstone of a people’s commonality, the essence of their associated life. It had to address their needs and desires, and be perceived as defending the most precious achievements of civilization” (Robin, 2004, p. 33). For Hobbes, fear and misery help to propel individuals out of the prison of solipsistic reason and into an act of collective rationality, which shapes them into the united political body of Leviathan. Hobbes does not exalt victimhood, but neither does he revile it. He seeks to escape the all-around victimization of the state of nature. But this is only possible because the isolated wolf-men learn from their common suffering. In other words, Hobbes attempts to transform collective self-victimization into collective political empowerment.

The Hero

While natural man “is at all times determined and ready to trample on reason and logic in order to secure for himself immediate, momentary advantage,” “luckily all men aren’t simply ‘pure’ wolves. They are endowed with intelligence, even though in the state of nature they wage the war of all against all” (Schmitt, 1938/2008, p. 36). While in the natural state, this intelligence is imprisoned within a solipsistic form of thinking:

the more they reason (each of them solitarily), the more they will be menaced and unhappy. This will last until they light on, and put into application, the difficult idea of reasoning *together*, entering into mutual covenants, and setting up a power able to make them good. (Tricaud, 1988/1999, p. 122)

According to Kavka (1986), “one of Hobbes’s major contributions to social and political philosophy” was to indicate the “apparent divergence between the course recommended by individual and collective rationality” (p. 109). “If the parties in the state of nature each follow the individually more rational course of action,” explains Kavka, “they ironically end up, each and all, with a result worse than they would have obtained had they all adopted the less rational course” (p. 109). Individual and collective rationality produce quite different results: the former leads to misery and war; the latter, to peace and prosperity.

For each of my monster theorists, reason is a sublime faculty that allows humans to transcend monstrosity, unite and connect to the divine. Individual valorism is synonymous with traditional representations of the hero. In Hobbes’s narrative, reasoning together becomes a heroic endeavor that helps to conquer the beast within.

It will function this way for Romero as well.⁴⁵ Subjects in the natural state may, through mutual covenant, through an act of reasoned speech, manifest their potential for civility. Energized by the fear of death, they reason together to summon Leviathan. “The terror of the state of nature,” Schmitt writes, “drives anguished individuals to come together; their fear rises to an extreme; a spark of reason (*ratio*) flashes, and suddenly there stands in front of them a new god” (1938/2008, p. 31).

Hobbes’s social contract is an act of creation in which “the multitude” is “united in one person” (Hobbes, 1966, p. 132). *Leviathan* – like *Frankenstein*, and several other religious and mythic narratives – is a creation story. It centers upon the theme of life creation as a god-like power. In *Genesis*, God creates man (Adam) in his own image. Dr. Frankenstein also creates another life form in the image of himself, except that his creation is a living dead monster made from the parts of different corpses. In a similar dynamic, Hobbes positions himself in the role of scientist-creator. He conceives a giant man machine, in the image of a king, assembled from multiple bodies, and shows his readers how to assemble themselves into such a configuration.

Whereas *Frankenstein* explores the horrific consequences of man trying to assume the god-like power to create life, *Leviathan* is optimistic about this capacity. In the beginning of *Leviathan*, Hobbes defines man as “that rational and most excellent work of nature” (1962/1966, p. 19), God’s finest creation. God places his capacity for “art” into man. Man can imitate God by creating life, though the life that man creates is artificial and not natural. The introduction of *Leviathan* begins with these words:

⁴⁵ As Leah A. Murray (2010) has noted, Romero’s heroic characters are communitarians who attempt to overcome the violent individualism that tears humanity apart. They seek to create a new form of society through dialogue and consensus decision-making. But whereas Hobbes shows humans succeeding in their efforts to constitute a collectivity, Romero does not. In his zombie films, humans rarely survive, let alone conjure a god-like sovereign entity.

“Nature,⁴⁶ the art whereby God hath made and governs the world, is by the *art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an artificial animal” (p. 19). Leviathan – “an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural” (p. 19) – is the product of humanity’s god-like ability to create artificial life in its own image. Humans re-enact, in the mortal realm, their own creation. Humanity participates in the art of God by assembling itself into “that *mortal god*, to which we owe under the *immortal God*, our peace and defence” (p.132).⁴⁷

The development of Hobbes’s political thought – from *De Cive* to *Leviathan* – reflects the linear sequence of the monster narrative. He introduces the wolf in *De Cive* and conquers it in *Leviathan*. The frontispieces of these works demonstrate the monstrous natural state and civilized human society, respectively. The *De Cive* cover depicts a figure that represents the “savages” of America,⁴⁸ a predatory cat prowling outside of a village fence, and an image of cannibalism (Rossello, 2012, p. 266). Seeking to prevent humans from transforming into beastly predators, he presents, in the introduction to *Leviathan*, our heroic savior, the great Leviathan. In *Leviathan*’s image, the majestic sovereign has (apparently) triumphed over the barbarity of the state of nature.

⁴⁶ Note that “nature,” in this usage, means something different than it does in the phrase “state of nature;” the latter represents the collective situation in which individuals find themselves prior to incorporation within Leviathan. “Nature” in the “state of nature” implies the opposite of “art” and “artefact” (Tricaud, p. 108); it implies the lack or absence of humans exercising their capacity to create, to manufacture.

⁴⁷ A close reader and Reformation re-interpreter of the Bible (Springborg, 1995, p. 356; Johnston, 1986, pp. 134-142), Hobbes chose for the name and representative image of his commonwealth that great being depicted in *The Book of Job*: “Upon earth there is not his like, a creature without fear. He beholds everything that is high; he is king over all the sons of pride” (41:33-34).

⁴⁸ According to Skinner, this figure looks like depictions of Native Americans in the paintings of John White (Rossello, 2012, p. 266).

Some may argue that I here attribute too much intellectual significance to the frontispieces of these books. In respect to the *Leviathan* cover, although the image was likely made by Wenzel Hollar, former drawing tutor to Charles, there are elements of it that so closely translate Hobbes's thinking into imagery that Keith Brown, author of "The Artist of the *Leviathan* Title-Page," asks, "To what extent do we face here a work of Wenzel Hollar, and to what extent are we facing a work of Thomas Hobbes himself?" (1978, p. 30). According to Malcolm,

That the overall scheme of the drawing, and many of its details, derived from Hobbes himself cannot be doubted...he took great care over such matters, as the engraved title pages of his Thucydides translation and of *De Cive* (at least, of the first edition of the latter) amply show. (2002/2004, pp. 200-201)

In other words, the frontispieces accurately reflect Hobbes's views of monstrosity and humanity. *Leviathan*'s title page represents the heroic solution to the monstrosity of *De Cive*'s cover.

The cover of *Leviathan* – "what is perhaps the most famous visual image in the history of modern political philosophy" (Malcom, 2002/2004, p. 200) – presents an idealistic, awe-inspiring image of the sovereign. It depicts an enormous kingly figure, "a majestic huge man" (Schmitt, 1938/2008, p. 19). Towering over a city below, he holds a sword in his right and a crosier in his left. The multitude he personates is incorporated within his body. Schmitt comments on this image:

In the long history of political theories, a history exceedingly rich in colorful images and symbols, icons and idols, paradigms and phantasms, emblems and

allegories, this leviathan is the strongest and most powerful image. It shatters the framework of every conceivable theory or construct. (p. 5).

Plato's monstrous mob "evokes an effective image, but by far not the extraordinary mythical power of the leviathan" (p. 5).

The *Leviathan* frontispiece embodies a utopian vision. "A utopia is *eu topos*, a good place, but it is also *ou topos*, no place" (Avramenko & Gingerich, 2014, p. 58). Similarly, it is a good time, but it is also outside of time. The utopian image abstracts from the spatial and temporal coordinates of reality in order to visualize a better world. Hobbes's kingly figure presides over a scene of domestic tranquility. No disruptive passions or motions are visible; no evidence of wolfishness is to be found.⁴⁹ His utopian image conquers human monstrosity by freezing time in a moment of imaginary idealism. Like Plato before him and Tocqueville and Romero after, Hobbes reaches for a "place" outside of time and space in order to imagine a world in which humanity unites and conquers monstrosity, despite how unrealistic that utopian vision may seem in the present moment.⁵⁰

Does humanity participate in the hero subject position in Hobbes's narrative, or is it simply the matter out of which the hero is formed? As noted above, the people summon and incarnate Leviathan through the difficult task of realizing the need to reason collectively, as opposed to individually. Ontologically, they literally *are* the hero, insofar as they constitute the body of Leviathan. Although individuals participate in the creation

⁴⁹ This is not entirely true. *Leviathan* is a cannibal who has consumed his subjects, as I discuss below.

⁵⁰ Socrates would have us look beyond the material world to the Good, which is the source of all beings, but not itself an existent being (Mitchell, 2006). Toqueville, who agrees with the Platonic metaphysic, writes of the need for democratic individuals to follow their "sublime instincts" into the "other world," which is immortal and eternal, in order to counter their slavish attachment to the body and material objects. And Romero searches "for a higher plane of existence" in his films (as cited in Maddrey, 2004, p. 51).

of Leviathan, and they literally constitute his body, they are not Leviathan; they do not hold themselves in awe and enforce the peace. And thus they are not the heroes of Hobbes's narrative. But they nonetheless do more than "the people" in many horror narratives; the latter are simply passive, objectified, victimized matter, and do not even appear for a moment as a meaningful agent.⁵¹

Leviathan conclusively ends the war between monstrosity and humanity, and creates the conditions in which an orderly, productive life may arise. It performs the heroic functions of defeating the wolf-man, upholding the humanity of its subjects, and saving civilization. Although the state of nature will always exist between cities, it may, Hobbes argues, be eradicated within the borders of the city that is ruled by Leviathan. Leviathan creates a humanized space within a world of violent monsters. It contains the monstrosity of its subjects in their dealings with each other, allowing them to safely cast off their beastly inclinations and act in good faith. The conditions of civil society permit the humanity of individuals to flourish, so much so that they become god-like.

Hobbes's solution appears to be unique within the history of the genre. Indeed, I cannot think of another narrative in which individuals collectively constitute themselves into a gigantic man-machine in order to stabilize their humanity. "The depiction of a commonwealth as a 'huge man', which has been traced to Plato, characterizes, for example, a mob stirred by irrational emotions, a multiheaded and 'multicolored creature'" (Schmitt, 1938/2008, p. 5), not a triumphant mechanical sovereign.

What are we to make of the fact that Hobbes's hero is male? For Su Fang Ng (2012), Leviathan is "an unarguably masculinist representation" (p. 84). The "inclusion

⁵¹ For example, except for the heroic "final girl" – the female who survives and sometimes defeats the monster – the characters in a typical slasher film like *Halloween* or *A Nightmare on Elm Street* often function as victims in kill scenes (Colver, 1992).

of the paternal state suggests residual patriarchy” in Hobbes’s thought (p 84). However, according to Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes thinks that the sovereign representative can just as well be a woman as a man” (Hirschmann & Wright, 2012, p. 26). Hobbes notes that most commonwealths have been established by men, but he also acknowledges Amazon society as an instance in which women set up a commonwealth (p. 28). Carole Pateman points out that “Hobbes is the only theorist of an original contract who begins with men and women as equals in the state of nature” (Hirschmann and Wright, 2012, pp. 19-20). Men and women equally participate in the monstrosity and victimhood of the natural state, in the task of creating Leviathan through their collective consent, and, at least potentially, in the position of the sovereign. Therefore while the image of the sovereign on the cover of *Leviathan* is male, this does not reflect Hobbes’s view of the nature of sovereignty. The majestic sovereign may be a man or woman. In this respect, Hobbes anticipates Romero, who disrupts traditional representations of the subject positions by consistently placing women in the position of the hero.

The Monstrosity of Leviathan

For some, Hobbes himself is a monster. As we saw in the work of Plato – in the response of the Cave prisoners to the philosopher-liberator, and in the response of the majority of Athenian jurors to Socrates’s dialectical examinations – many individuals have a tendency to react with hostility and even violence towards those who embody otherness, especially individuals who question or challenge the foundational beliefs and norms of the social order. For his efforts to reveal the monstrous nature of Athenian subjectivity, Socrates was ultimately cast in the subject position of the monster and destroyed. The trajectory of Hobbes’s career was not as dramatically heroic as that of

Plato's Socrates, but Hobbes, like Socrates, was, in the eyes of some, a dangerous monster who threatened the moral order.

According to Schmitt, "Hobbes has become more famous and notorious because of his *Leviathan* than as a result of all his other work. In fact, to the general public he was summarily known as a 'prophet of the leviathan'" (1938/2008, p. 5). "No illustration of or quotation about a theory of state," he continues, "has engendered so provocative an image as that of the leviathan (p. 5). Similarly, Stillman notes, "as a monster text, *Leviathan's* reputation for wickedness earned Hobbes the label 'the Monster of Malmesbury'" (1995, p. 794).

Like *Psycho* and *Night* and other taboo-breaking works of horror, Hobbes's dark portrait of humanity in the natural state provoked intense moral outrage amongst contemporary intellectuals like Robert Filmer, author of *Patriarcha*, and Anglican clergyman Samuel Parker. Rossello writes, "Hobbes's contemporaries were outraged at his depiction of human life in the state of nature" (2012, p. 258). They "perceived him as radically departing from the scriptural account of Creation to posit creatures abandoned by God to a brutish and animalistic existence," and "all shared a definite animosity towards Hobbes's animalization of the human being" (p. 258). "Robert Filmer...argued that it should not be thought that 'God would create man in a condition worse than beasts' and worried that such a condition would make men 'worse than cannibals'" (p. 258).

This reception was in no small part due to Hobbes's controversial reading of Scripture and his argument for the subsidiary role of religion within public life. Hobbes's depiction of natural men unsettled the religious distinction between man and animal that

has been at the center of the Western logos since at least ancient Greece, and that is present in the creation story of Genesis, in which God bestows dominion over the animals to man (1:24, Revised Standard Version).⁵² Hobbes was condemned as an atheist due to his theological minimalism, and shortly after his death *Leviathan* was burned at Oxford University, where he had studied Aristotelian logic and philosophy.

For Schmitt, Hobbes and his great work are ultimately the subject of misunderstanding and demonization: “What could have been a grand signal of restoration of the vital energy and political unity,” he writes, “began to be perceived in a ghostly light and became a grotesque horror picture” (1938/2008, pp. 81). Schmitt is right to point out that Hobbes and his theory were misunderstood and demonized. This follows from the fact that Hobbes contradicted long-standing epistemic and cultural categories within his society. But even in the most sympathetic light *Leviathan* is a strange sort of hero. In fact, it is obviously a monster, albeit not in the same sense in which Hobbes’s contemporary critics perceived it to be.

Like the wolf-man, *leviathan* is a hybrid. Typical monstrous hybrids take the form of the human-animal (e.g., the centaur), the animal-animal (e.g., the mantichore), and the human-machine (e.g., the cyborg). *Leviathan* is a four-part hybrid. “What appears to have been attained,” writes Schmitt, “is a mythical totality composed of god, man, animal, and machine” (p. 19). According to Tracy Strong, “the *leviathan* is a great man, it is a mortal god, and it is a machine. It is also a monster” (Schmitt, 1938/2008, p. xiii). Hobbes thus fuses a gigantic human, beastly imagery from the Bible, and modern mechanistic ontology in order to create *Leviathan*.

⁵² *Genesis*, 1:24: “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”

Leviathan is a beastly predator. Recall that Hobbes, in *De Cive*, acknowledged the wisdom of “the saying...that Kings should be classed as predatory animals” (1998, p. 3). “In Hobbes, the foundation of sovereign power,” Agamben (1995/1998) argues, “is to be sought not in the subjects’ free renunciation of their natural right but in the sovereign’s preservation of his natural right to do anything to anyone, which now appears as the right to punish” (p. 106). “The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact that the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order” (p. 15). The sovereign never exited the state of nature, and never repudiated the violent animality of that condition. Instead, the sovereign imports the beastliness of the natural condition into civil society, expressing it within “states of exception,” which bypass human law and civility. In other words, the Hobbesian sovereign maintains one foot in the world of the beast, and the other in civil society. Agamben notes “the special proximity of werewolf and sovereign” within mythological narratives, as well as within the political theories of Plato and Hobbes (p. 108).

“Leviathan is represented in the frontispiece with recognizable human traits, but a simple genealogy of this mythical creature suggests a more beastly lineage,” notes Rossello (2012, p. 266). In the Bible, “notwithstanding some obscurities and confusion,” Schmitt explains, “leviathan invariably appears in powerful mythical representations as a huge water animal, as a crocodile or a whale or in general as an enormous fish...” (1938/2008, p. 6). As a religious figure, Leviathan is thus a “protean symbol” (Rossello, p. 266), but in each of its figurations it is a gapping maw, a monstrous consumer.

Leviathan is a cannibal. As we have seen, the cover of *De Cive* associates the state of nature with cannibalism. In one of the frontispiece’s scenes “two human figures

squat next to what appears to be a human limb in a trestle, presumably being prepared for eating” (Rossello, 2012, p. 266). The cover also incorporates a scene of savages hunting one of their own, and a large predatory cat, prowling outside of the village fences. These images suggest that “in the natural condition of man, the only law is to eat or be eaten” (Rossello, p. 266). Hobbes’s theory thus presents “a body politic that devours or is devoured” (Rossello, p. 267). Leviathan terminates the unregulated proliferation of cannibalism in the state of nature by monopolizing cannibalistic predation, by consuming its man-machine subjects.

The Man-Machine

Deploying a mechanistic ontology, Hobbes argues that the beings of this world are machines that function like watches and other automata (Hobbes, 1966, p. 19), and that the collective body should be assembled according to the mechanical nature of its human parts. Hobbes was not the first to conceive of the human as a machine. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes (1641/1998) argued that the human being is composed of two completely different substances: mind (*res cogitans*) and matter (*res extensa*), the famous Cartesian dualism. The image that Descartes presented was specifically mechanistic. In his *Treatise on Man*, Descartes imagined the “body to be but a statue, an earthen machine” within which the mind was situated (1664/1972, p. 2).

Descartes’ stated intention in *Meditations* was to prove the existence of God and the immortal soul, but he advanced the modern de-spiritualization of the human self and the world by “expelling everything but the rational soul of human beings into the bleak, dark world of matter” (Pettit, 2008, p. 12). Although he did not eliminate the soul from his conception of the self – “Descartes asserted, as a latter, well-known parody put it, that

there had to be a ghost in the machine of the human body” (Pettit, p. 28) – the soul appears within his conception as a ghost, the remnant of a time when spiritual belief decisively guided human self-understanding.

Hobbes countered Descartes’s mind-body dualism with a monistic materialism, thereby exorcising the ghostly presence of the soul from the Cartesian conception of the self. “Hobbes was a fervent opponent of dualism,”⁵³ Pettit explains (2008, p. 12). “His response to the scientific image of the world...was to embrace monism as distinct from dualism, and argue that everything in the world, our own mind included, was entirely material in nature” (p. 12). Hobbes agreed that the human is a machine, but disagreed that it contained any immaterial substance such as mind or soul. For Hobbes, the world – and every being in it – is made of matter and nothing but. “For him, there is no ghost in the machine. Human beings are machinelike the whole way through” (Pettit, p. 28). Hobbes thus completed the mechanization of the human being within Western philosophical discourse.

Schmitt (1938/2008) argues that it was Hobbes’s conceptualization of the state as a huge man-machine that allowed Hobbes to complete the mechanization of the image of man begun by Descartes:

After the body and soul of the huge man became a machine, the transfer back became possible, and even the little man could become a *homme-machine*. The

⁵³ Hobbes may have been a fervent opponent of mind-body dualism, but he embraced other forms of dualism. In his thinking, individuals are fusions of wolf and man, or man and machine. In this respect, although he does not see two different ontological substances within the human, he does see two different forms of being. Furthermore, he divides the world between the state of nature and civil society. The individual is both wolf and man in the state of nature, and both human and machine in civil society. Overall, Hobbes is a thoroughly dualistic thinker who makes great efforts to classify the things of the world into conceptual binaries.

mechanization of the concept of the state thus completed the mechanization of the anthropological image of man. (p. 37)

What does this mechanization of the image of man reveal about modern subjectivity? Scholars have noted that the image of Leviathan reflects the passive spectatorship of modern political subjectivity. Leviathan “has devoured his subjects, has incorporated them into his own being, while they themselves are transfixed, regarding their devourer” (Jacobson, 1998, p. 1; as cited in Rossello, 2012, p. 266). The mechanized subjects of Leviathan – who are “midgets (Schmitt, 1938/2008, p. 18) or “homunculi” (Rogin, 1987/1988, p. 300) – are frozen in awe before their new god.

Michael Rogin highlights the significance of the visual, as a means of exacting subservience, within Hobbes’s theory, and for modern politics more generally. Noting how “theatrical spectacle in the Tudor and Stuart court...elicited the obedience of the subjects to the Crown (1987/1988, p. 298), Rogin argues that the Leviathan frontispiece “offers a preview and ideal type of the relationship between modern mass society and the state” (p. 300). In fact, it “uncannily presages the invocation to President Ronald Reagan at the 1984 Republican convention, in which Nancy Reagan, representing the televised audience, stares at the enormous head and shoulders of the chief of state” (p. 300).

Leviathan thus reveals the passive spectatorship of the modern subject, who is slavishly absorbed in the sovereign spectacle. Of course, every president since John F. Kennedy – not only Reagan – has taken advantage of the ability to instantaneously project his image around the nation, into the homes of every American with a television set.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ George Bush Jr. took great advantage of spectacular politics. Immediately after 9/11, he was photographed with a firefighter in front of the ruins at Ground Zero. And in May of 2003 he addressed the nation from an aircraft carrier with a “Mission Accomplished” banner displayed in the background.

Several horror and science fiction narratives depict giant apparatuses captivating individuals through spectacle, and then consuming the enslaved victims. *The Matrix* (1999) represents humans as unconscious pod-people who are absorbed in pleasant but ersatz spectacles as they are used as batteries for a machine civilization. In one scene the machine masters liquefy the bodies of dead humans, which are then fed intravenously to human infants. Here, Marx's vampiric capital has become a completely autonomous system of deception and cannibalistic predation.

In a scene from Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005), zombies stand transfixed, mesmerized by the fireworks that a human raiding party has set off, oblivious to the fact that they will soon be slaughtered by the human war machine that disrupts the tranquility of their home, Uniontown. The zombie leader, Big Daddy, sees the deadly purpose of the fireworks, and attempts to awaken his fellow zombies from their stupor.

With these critiques of the man-machine in mind, Hobbes's wolf-man takes on a different significance. Hobbes "conceptualizes resistance to becoming part of a commonwealth as a sign of something beastly, untamable" (Rossello, 2012, p. 273). But what if society – or specific institutions within it – functions like a beastly predator that consumes and diminishes its domesticated subjects? If society demands mechanistic conformity, then the untamable beast may be interpreted as a symbol of "the reemergence...of liberty in subjection" (Rossello, p. 273).

How shall we account for the two quite different meanings of the wolf-man – destructive predation, on the one hand, and liberation, on the other? According to a Native American narrative, the human psyche is the site of an internal conflict between two wolves, a wolf of peace and a wolf of predatory violence. The nature of the human

personality depends upon which of these wolves one feeds through habitual thoughts and deeds (Lipton & Bhaerman, 2009). The vital energies of the human have often been directed towards predatory and cannibalistic ends. But they also might be utilized for the purpose of liberation from the ideological and infrastructural machinery of civilization. From this perspective, it is hopeful and promising that “the animality of the human...might be ungovernable as such – at least in the terms of the commonwealth delineated by Hobbes” (Rossello, 2012, p. 273).

Conclusion

Hobbes is not only a theorist of monstrosity, he is also a monstrous theorist. He utilizes a hybridic methodology in order to produce the image of humans as wolf-like predators in the state of nature, a nightmarish vision that shocked and outraged several of his contemporaries. Hobbes creatively deploys the subject positions of the horror genre – monster, victim, and hero – in order to tell the story of a giant man-machine who defeats the predatory wolf and upholds human civilization. In the natural state, humans are monstrous predators and victims. Realizing their ability to reason together, Hobbes’s wolf-men conjure Leviathan, who releases them from their prison of solipsistic rationality and beastly impulses.

Although Hobbes’s Leviathan has been demonized and misunderstood, it is truly a modern monstrosity, albeit not in the same sense in which his contemporary critics deemed it to be. Leviathan is a beastly predator that consumes its mechanized subjects. However, Hobbes does not see or is not interested in the fact that he asks us to exchange one form of monstrosity (the wolf) for another (the automaton). Hobbes’s narrative thus reflects a transition from the ancient monstrosity of the wolf-man to the modern

monstrosity of the man-machine. As such, it is valuable for anyone concerned with fathoming the horrors and dysfunctions of modern mechanistic subjectivity.

Hobbes endorses and advances the paradigm of mechanistic materialism that Tocqueville will come to fear and see as a source of human degradation and slavery. In *Democracy in America*, materialism threatens humanity with a dystopian future in which the mass lives a pathetic existence under the domination of a tyrannical bureaucratic apparatus. In other words, Hobbes's utopia becomes Tocqueville's dystopia.

Chapter 5—Zombies in America: Tocqueville and the Living Dead Americans

They seemed to be imprisoned, not only by the sterile walls of the city, but by their own flesh. It seemed to Grandfather that these people believed only in the flesh, and the flesh became their only god.

-Tom Brown Jr.

Introduction

The reader will not find allegorical constructs, mythological references or literal monsters scattered throughout the pages or adorning the cover of *Democracy in America*. In this respect, it differs from *The Republic* and *Leviathan*, each of which makes liberal use of rhetoric and imagery from our collective horrific imaginary. Although Tocqueville does not utilize monstrosity with the same colorful variety as Plato and Hobbes, he is nonetheless one of its great theorists in that he offers an analysis of the historical and psycho-political dynamics of American zombieism. Reading *Democracy in America* through the lens of the monster, we see that, in Tocqueville's eyes, modern democracy generates a form of monstrosity that is not captured by the fantastic figures of European Gothic horror; it ushers in an age of mundane, intellectualized, mass monstrosity. It reduces individuals to a mass of living dead bodies, controlled by the invisible chords of majority tyranny, driven into incessant economic activity by the "taste for material gratifications."

Tocqueville scholars have not examined *Democracy in America* through the lens of the monster, and nor have they shown the relationship between his democratic character and the zombie. This chapter argues that Tocqueville's tyrannized mass exhibits the same characteristics as the zombie horde – mechanical behavior, mass

conformity, and enslavement to appetite – albeit in a more incipient form, at an earlier stage of historical development. Unlike Romero, Tocqueville emphasizes automaton slavery, not apocalyptic consumption. However, Tocqueville also detects the presence of an uncontrollable desire to consume. He thus observes the tension within the American self between the utilitarian man-machine, on the one hand, and the cannibal zombie, on the other.

Tocqueville finds a window into the machine-like despotism of democratic society in the American penitentiary, which he investigates early in his career (Boesche, 1980; Avrimenko & Gingerich, 2014). With its regime of strict separation, cruel isolation, absolute equality of conditions, moral reform of the soul, and labor, the penitentiary embodies an intensified portrait of what democratic citizens may – and to a certain extent already have – become. The Americans, he believes, have made their methodical pursuit of well-being and equality into an invisible mass prison.

In America, Tocqueville witnesses the horrors of the democratic future: the unbridled pursuit of equality, which generates a world of universal sameness; the intellectualized violence of majority tyranny, which controls the souls of citizens; and the insatiable “taste for material gratifications,” which turns individuals away from the eternal and infinite sublime – and away from each other – producing a state of constant inner turmoil and agitated economic motion. In other words, for Tocqueville, democracy gives rise to a slavish mass that lives to work and consume. America is a land of the living dead in which apparent physical freedom is actually psychic slavery. Through its mechanical conformity and obsession with consumer goods, the tyrannized mass, Tocqueville fears, will deliver itself into the arms of a tyrant.

American democracy makes monstrosity into an intellectual phenomenon. It intellectualizes monstrosity. Tocqueville sees a people who focus their erotic energies upon egalitarian and economic ends, a people defined by their love of equality and their love of money. Enslaving themselves to majority dictate, the Americans have intellectualized the physical slavery of past tyrannies. Conflating the proper aim of the animal appetites (physical survival and pleasure) with that of the soul (spiritual transcendence), they have also subjected themselves to a sublimated form of appetitive tyranny. In America, the search for appetitive satisfaction has been spiritualized, made into a methodical pursuit of making money. In this respect, Tocqueville's democratic character resembles Plato's oligarch and Hobbes's man-machine.

In America, well-being is not an embodied reality; it is an intellectual obsession that produces anxiety and inner turmoil. Tocqueville depicts Americans as miserable and unhappy amidst their material prosperity. Constantly obsessing over absent objects, they do not permit themselves to enjoy what they already have. However, this is not a stable scenario. Within the mechanical framework of democratic existence Tocqueville notes the presence of a "wild ardor," an uncontrolled impulse to give one's self over to consumption. In other words, he reveals the conflict within the American self between the oligarch and the democrat (in Plato's terms); between the repressed, money-loving worker and the monstrous consumer; between Hobbes's man-machine and Romero's cannibal zombie. Therefore while Tocqueville fears a dystopian future of mechanistic enslavement, he also notes the presence of the beastly impulses that will disintegrate the automaton structure of American civilization in *Night of the Living Dead*.

A Nightmarish Vision of the Democratic Future

Tocqueville is, in the words of Manent (1996), “a voyager in quest of an essence, or nature – that of democracy” (p. xvi). He “goes to America to discover exactly what one has to fear and what one is allowed to hope for from democracy” (p. xv). According to Rodgers (1988), “the second volume of *Democracy in America* was written in the orphic style of a man increasingly obsessed to read the future, to guess the shape of the ‘half buried’ world rising under his feet” (p. 194). Tocqueville posits two possible democratic futures: “sovereignty of all” or “absolute power of one” (Manent, 1996, p. 2), democratic self-governance or mass tyranny.⁵⁵ Of course, Tocqueville was not a prophet in the strict sense. He did not unequivocally state that humanity would enter one or the other state. However, neither does he believe that these futures are equally probable. As he penned the second volume of *Democracy in America*, he believed that democracy was headed down the path of despotism.

“The principal fear that colors Tocqueville’s writings, from *Democracy* to the *Old Regime* and from his first letter to his last notes,” writes Boesche (1980), “is a fear that modern democracy harbors a tendency to a qualitatively and historically new type of despotism” (p. 550). Tocqueville vividly portrays this fear near the end of *Democracy in America*, which he “concludes...with a cautionary fantasy shaped out of his worst forebodings about democracy” (Kaledin, 2011, pp. 354-355). Drawing upon “subhuman images,” he leaves the reader with a “nightmare vision” of “human life reduced to

⁵⁵ Romero also appears to believe that these are the two options open to humanity. On the one hand, he presents the failed model of the tyrant (Captain Rhodes in *Day*, Kaufman in *Land*; and, to a lesser extent, Mr. Cooper and Ben in *Night*); on the other, he gives glimpses of collective and cooperative decision-making, most noticeably amongst the protagonists in *Day* and *Land*. Indeed, those of his characters who are heroic – at least in part – and who survive the film are collectivists; the greedy and violent narcissists all die, often at the hands of the zombies.

inertia” (Kaledin, 2011, p. 355). Tocqueville fears a future in which conformity and materialism have glutted, standardized, de-politicized and enslaved the soul: “I am trying to imagine what new features despotism might have in today’s world: I see an innumerable host of men, all alike and equal, endlessly hastening after petty and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls” (2004, p. 818). “Over these men,” Tocqueville continues, “stands an immense tutelary power, which assumes sole responsibility for securing their pleasure and watching over their fate. It is absolute, meticulous, regular, provident, and mild” (p. 818). After listing the many ways in which democratic individuals alienate their power to this monstrous bureaucratic apparatus, he asks: “Why not relieve them entirely of the trouble of thinking and the difficulty of living?” (p. 818).

Several canonical texts within modern and contemporary political thought – from *Leviathan* to *Capital* to *One-Dimensional Man* – depict a giant machine controlling, deadening and/or consuming an enslaved mass of humans. This horrific image is also present in *Democracy in America*, in which Tocqueville describes the relationship between a dehumanized mass and the centralized tyrannical apparatus that it calls into being.

The Prison

Like Plato and Hobbes, Tocqueville uses the concept of imprisonment in order to represent the monstrosity of the human. He perceives the normal subjects of modern democratic society as prisoners of majority tyranny and materialism. Tocqueville apparently first glimpses this monstrous truth of the democratic order early in his career, within the American penitentiary. In *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and its Application in France*, Tocqueville and co-author Gustave de Beaumont describe the

American prison as the “most complete despotism” (1964, p. 79; as cited in Boesche, 1980, p. 550).⁵⁶ “Like Orwell’s *1984*, Tocqueville’s report on the penitentiary system provides an imaginative lens through which to reflect on dystopic possibilities” (Avrinenko & Gingerich, 2014, p. 58).

While the prison plays an important role within Tocqueville’s critique of democracy, it has not received much extended analysis in comparison to Plato’s cave and Hobbes’s state of nature. “Only two articles in the social sciences devote themselves wholly to the *Systeme Penitentiare*” (Avrinenko & Gingerich, 2014, p. 60).⁵⁷ Although I do not analyze *On the Penitentiary System*, this chapter does contribute to the examination of the prison within Tocqueville’s thinking by approaching it as a horrific heuristic that reveals the monstrous nature of democratic subjectivity, specifically within the American context.

The figure of the prisoner, and the concept of imprisonment more generally, function differently within Tocqueville’s critique of democratic subjectivity than they do within the work of Plato and Hobbes. Whereas Plato and Hobbes imagined their prisoner scenarios, Tocqueville finds his in the real world, within the reformed penitentiary of Jacksonian America. While Plato and Hobbes consciously and explicitly deploy their horrific heuristics, “Tocqueville does not frankly acknowledge – in either his published writings or in his letters – that his prison observations provided him with a rudimentary model for his subsequent description of a new despotism,” notes Boesche (1980, pp. 550-

⁵⁶ Scholars often minimize Tocqueville’s role in the writing of *On the Penitentiary System*. But through analysis of his letters Avrinenko and Gingerich (2014) show that Tocqueville “was intimately involved in writing the *Système Pénitentiare*, and that the text represents his thoughts as much as does *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville did, in fact, contribute significantly to the work and the analysis in the body is shaped by his observations and research” (p. 60).

⁵⁷ They are referring to Boesche (1980) and Schwartz (1985). Their article brings the total to three. Books by Dumm (1987) and Smith (2009) also discuss Tocqueville’s analysis of the American prison in relation to his critique of democratic subjectivity.

551). Instead, he “apparently stumbled upon” (Boesche, 1980, p. 551) – or “perhaps unwittingly” utilized (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, p. 58) – this model. “It is unlikely that Tocqueville intended his report to serve as an indictment of American (of French) democracy in general” (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, p. 58).

Tocqueville’s apparent lack of awareness or conscious intention regarding how the prison functioned within his thinking does not detract from its epistemological value. In fact, the greatest horrific visions are effective at revealing the hidden dysfunctions of society precisely because they are conceived and received by individuals who have relaxed the normal parameters of the conscious mind, allowing themselves to perceive what Robin Wood, in his analysis of the American horror film, calls “our collective nightmares” (1986/2003, pp. 69). Tocqueville is an “intuitional” type of prophet who sees “under the mundane surface of everyday life the half-concealed patterns of a world in birth” (Rodgers, 1988, p. 197). And his nightmare vision of that world in birth – a world of living death – is rooted in his observations of the hellish penitentiary mechanism.

Intuitional prophets “work not by extrapolation but by hunch and metaphor” (Rodgers, 1988, p. 197). The machine was “a metaphor appropriate to the nineteenth century” (Boesche, 1980, p. 555). In Pennsylvania, Tocqueville saw a prison that “functioned like a cooperative machine” (Boesche, p. 555). Inmates were like generic parts within a frictionless mechanism. “The movements are so regular, so calm, so perfect, that one would say it was a machine carrying out its mechanical function without any friction in the wheels,” Tocqueville writes (as cited in Boesche, p. 555).

In the penitentiary Tocqueville observes a disciplinary regime based upon strict separation, cruel isolation, absolute uniformity, and moral reform of the soul. The only reprieve from isolation and boredom is the “petty pleasure” of labor, which inmates willingly undertake in silence. Tocqueville is amazed that only a few supervisors are needed to oversee the laboring prisoners, who could easily overpower their captors if they were to unite and rebel (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014).

American democracy atomizes, mechanizes and massifies the self, both inside and outside of the prison walls. “Whether found in society at large or in the prison,” argues Boesche (1980), “the structure of despotism (isolation, equality, powerlessness, etc.) constitutes, for Tocqueville, a profound institutional and technical instrument that can be used for good or ill...” (p. 555). Although he believes that this instrument can perhaps be put to good use on the criminal as a means of spiritual reform,⁵⁸ to use it “on the presumably reasonable and moral individuals of society at large horrifies Tocqueville” (p. 555).

There is one crucial difference between the despotism of the prison and that of society. In the former the warden, the prison guards, and architectural design of the penitentiary fashion the inmates into a machine. In the latter citizens discipline themselves into isolated, generic parts of a mechanistic mass through majority dictate and utilitarian principle. And yet this difference is not so great, for Tocqueville fears that the relationship between citizens and their government will come to reflect the relationship between the inmates and their supervisors. In his nightmare vision of the democratic future in *Democracy in America* Tocqueville depicts a monstrous centralized government

⁵⁸ Tocqueville finds compelling evidence that reform does not take place, and he opposes the cruelty of solitary confinement (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, pp. 66-67).

that watches over and controls its “flock of timid and industrious animals” (2004, p. 819). The despotism that Tocqueville encounters in the American penitentiary thus foreshadows his later critique of democratic society.

Intellectualized Violence

In Tocqueville’s historical narrative, democratic peoples have broken free from the external levers of repressive monarchical power only to be reabsorbed into a form of universal psychic bondage. Democracy does not destroy tyranny; it shifts the object of tyrannical control from the body to the soul, and thereby succeeds in capturing the self. “Princes made violence a physical thing; but today’s democratic republics have made it as intellectual as the human will it seeks to coerce” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 294).

Democracy succeeds at instituting tyrannical mass mind-control because, like an evil voodoo sorcerer, “it ignores the body and goes straight for the soul” (Tocqueville, p. 294).

Monarchy desired to be a puppet master, but it did not know where to attach the strings. It “tried to reach the soul by striking crudely at the body; and the soul, eluding such blows, rose gloriously above it” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 294). By controlling and punishing the body, monarchy created the appearance of control, but not the reality. The interiority of the subject remained unmolested by political power. Although spatially confined and physically limited, the subject was able to think free thoughts.

Where monarchy failed, democracy succeeds. Freed from the more obvious forms of physical coercion found in monarchy, democratic citizens become subjected to a subtler – and more effective – form of despotic control. “The new despotism,” notes Boesche, “could penetrate past all barriers and into the private space and thoughts of the

individual” (1980, p. 556). Democracy internalizes the tyrannical relationship within the enervated psyche of its subjects. It changes the medium of control from the physical to the mental, replacing brute force – imprisonment, torture, beheading – with mental manipulation as the primary means of regulating the bodies of citizens. Democracy thus inverts the monarchical situation; bounding the soul in mental chains, it creates the appearance of freedom, when in reality subjects are hard-working slaves.

The American prison clearly manifests this dynamic. Unlike the medieval prison, which relied upon barbaric physical techniques like torture, the democratic penitentiary controls its subjects through “endless internal surveillance,” which “withers the soul while leaving the body intact” (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, p. 67).⁵⁹ The zombie-like condition of the American convicts is made possible by the architecture of the penitentiary. “Inside, the penitentiary approximates Bentham’s Panopticon” (p. 75). “Although the prisoner is isolated from his embodied companions, he is always accompanied by the disembodied eye of his keepers. The prisoner therefore is never divorced from the ‘moral force’ exuded by the penitentiary” (p. 74). Continuous surveillance – which becomes internalized within the psyche – not only makes the prisoners into agents of their own repression; it also prevents fraternization. “In Orwellian fashion, inmates feared association under the omniscient view of their keepers” (p. 74).

While inmates internalize the disciplinary norms of the prison “under the omnipotent and omniscient eyes of the God-like central authority” (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, p. 75), the members of society discipline themselves. More specifically,

⁵⁹ In his report, Tocqueville notes that more resources are spent on surveillance than on food and clothing (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, p. 74).

it is the majority that performs this function. In democratic society “the majority takes on god-like attributes” (Avramenko & Gingerich, p. 64). Democratic peoples supplicate themselves at the altar of the majority, that mythic entity that bestows equality and dictates norms. Under the generative principles of popular sovereignty and public opinion, the people transmogrify themselves into self-regulating slaves. They may project the image of freedom as they go about their daily business, but, like the penitentiary inmates, they have internalized the surveillance and enforcement mechanism of the prison within their minds, making physical coercion, for the most part, outdated and unnecessary. In a horrific inversion of Hobbes’s hopeful image, Tocqueville’s citizens become part of an all-powerful collective entity that dominates and dehumanizes its followers.

Like Plato’s prisoner, the American is subject to a taboo against leaving the confines of majority opinion.⁶⁰ Non-conformity is prohibited, eliminated at its mental source, both inside and outside the prison. In society, the people fear straying from the well-worn path because, in doing so, they will become impure and monstrous in the eyes of their fellows. Tocqueville explains what will happen to those who violate this taboo:

You will remain among men, but you will lose your rights to humanity. When you approach your fellow men, they will avoid you like an impure being...Go in peace, I leave you your life, but I leave it to you in a condition worse than death.

(Tocqueville, p. 294)

Paralyzed by the threat of social death, Americans do not venture beyond the boundaries of the normal and accepted pattern of existence. Instead, they become generic iterations and defenders of the mass. They are thus quick to overlook the constitutional rights of

⁶⁰ In fact, “tyranny of the majority” is an apt description for the condition of Plato’s prisoners.

minorities, of those who are not like them, or who do not submit to the will of the majority.

Democratic tyranny is invisible in its operations: the mechanism of power is hidden from the eye.⁶¹ The astute observer can see the effect of its operation (mass conformity), but not the method by which it is implemented (intellectualized violence). Tyranny is no longer an external and visible coercive relationship between sovereign and citizen, but an invisible relationship between the self and the god-like voice of the majority. Under the spell of public opinion, the mind becomes the site of an insidious operation that extinguishes the capacity for self-reflexivity and individuation; paralyzes the will such that it becomes a servant of social mimicry; and makes the citizen into the agent of his or her own domination. Democracy forces the modern self to supervise, regulate and control itself; to carry out the (hidden) work of repressive self-control; that is, it transforms political oppression into psychic repression,⁶² thereby setting the stage for the narrative of the semi-autonomous zombie slave.

The monster highlights the invisible operations of psychic violence in the subject. We should therefore expect to find monstrous depictions within the horror genre that resonate with Tocqueville's critique of the democratic mass. In the 1950s, American society will generate several paranoid visions of alien invasion and mass conformity. In films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Invisible Invaders* and *Night of the Living Dead*, the characters and audience cannot see the alien intelligence or mysterious force – the invisible master – that transmogrifies and controls the uncanny mass of copied or

⁶¹ Tocqueville thus anticipates Foucault (1984), who will argue that power is invisible, that it is everywhere, and that it pervades mind, body and discourse.

⁶² These are not Tocqueville's terms. Although he states that the sovereign "represses" the democratic citizen (2004, p. 819), he does not use the term oppression. However, I believe that they accurately capture the difference in his account between monarchical (physical) and democratic (psychic) forms of tyranny.

reanimated bodies. The authors of each of these texts use uncanny monstrosity – the presence of something unfamiliar that is somehow also familiar – in order to draw attention to the hidden dynamics of collective monstrous possession within the American populace. The zombific American mass – from *Democracy to Invasion to Night* – consists of individuals whose bodies move about in apparent freedom, but who, in reality, act out a slavish dependence upon an invisible majority dictate. In other words, these texts suggest that in American society freedom is tyranny.

Mass Assimilation

In *Democracy*'s nightmarish vision of democratic society, Tocqueville beholds “an innumerable host of men, all alike and equal” (2004, p. 818). In his penitentiary report, he depicts a more extreme version of the same phenomenon. “There is even more equality in the prison than in society,” he writes (as cited in Avrimenko & Gingerich, 2014, p. 71). In the American penitentiary, “all prisoners are equal under the omnipotent and omniscient eyes of the God-like central authority” (Avrimenko & Gingerich, 2014, p. 75). “Quite literally, each ate of the same bread, wore identical clothes, performed the same manual work, inhabited an identical cell” (Boesche, 1980, p. 552).

Such a vision represents a marked contrast to the personalities and social structure that one finds in aristocracy. Aristocratic society is, for Tocqueville, a repository of difference. Its intermediary institutions – the classes, guilds, estates, etc. – protect those whose viewpoints might offend any particular individual or group, thus allowing variations in personality to flourish. “Among aristocratic peoples, each man is all but fixed in his sphere, but men are extraordinarily dissimilar. Their passions, ideas, habits, and tastes vary in essential ways. Nothing budes, but difference abounds” (Tocqueville,

2004, p. 722). “With the collapse of aristocratic society, however,” notes Boesche, “the built-in diversity and hierarchy that accompanied the old regime vanished” (1980, p. 554).

Democracy eradicates difference from the modern landscape. In place of the distinctions of the feudal past, it posits an “equality of conditions,” which is the “generative fact” or “principle” giving rise to all other characteristic features of modern societies (Manent, 1996, p. 1).⁶³ The equalization of society affects a horizontal sweep. It flattens the differentiated social hierarchy of aristocracy – and the corresponding spectrum of variegated personalities – into an undifferentiated mass, which is the social formation that is specific to the historical equalization of democracy. Manent (1996) articulates this distinction between aristocratic and democratic subjectivity in terms of particularity and universality: “Aristocracy is on the side of the particular, and democracy on the side of the general or universal. And the more society democratizes, the more it is modeled on what is universally human” (p. 71). Democratic equalization eliminates variability in behavior, making it “as difficult to escape the common rule by way of one’s vices as by way of one’s virtues” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 621).

Democracy eliminates the inequalities of aristocracy, and instantiates equality throughout society, but this does not satiate the egalitarian passions of the people. On the contrary, it inflames them. Tocqueville makes the argument that as equality increases, so does intolerance of inequality, of that which strays beyond the social average. In other

⁶³ Equality of conditions is, for Tocqueville, a phenomenon that pervades democratic society and subjectivity. It molds personal psychology and structures national political processes. Democracy acknowledges the inherent worth and political rights of its citizens, removing the rigid class structure of those previous governmental forms, allowing individuals to pursue their economic interests, advance their social positions, and participate in political power. The principle of popular sovereignty makes the people the foundation of governmental authority, empowering them to rule through town hall meetings and elections, and to shape public opinion, which sets the parameters of socially acceptable thought and behavior.

words, what is required to stir the passion for equality shrinks as people become more alike.⁶⁴ The passion for equality is insatiable because the object at which it aims – a perfect equality – is ultimately unrealizable. Even within a sea of ubiquitous conformity, individuals will always embody certain differences, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant they may appear to the outside observer.

Like Plato's prisoners, Tocqueville's democratic citizens are slaves to a desire that monotonously chases an illusory object; they pursue an ideological phantasm that can never be reached. Without the intervention of self-conscious psychic regulation, the passion for equality becomes an all-consuming force that continuously agitates the mind, throwing citizens into a never-ending search for the illusive goal of absolute equality. Tocqueville's description of this pursuit brings to mind the mythological will'o'the wisp, the light that continuously beckons travelers onwards, but always recedes as they approach:

Although they always think they are about to catch up with it, invariably it eludes their grasp. They get close enough to know equality's charms but not close enough to enjoy them, and they die before having fully savored its delights. (p. 628)

The ideal of a perfect equality that democratic citizens hold in their mind's eye is a mirage; and the passion aiming at the realization of that ideal will never be satiated, for the latter is always just beyond one's grasp.

⁶⁴ The two factors – equality, and intolerance of inequality – are directly proportional; they increase in tandem. As individuals become more similar, they become more sensitive to differences (which stand out more noticeably against a backdrop of sameness); more intolerant of perceived inequalities; hungrier for equalization. Objectively, the people may be quite similar in every respect; and yet, subjectively, in their minds, they perceive inequalities.

The democratic passion for equality gives rise to a monstrous dynamic, which is reflected within Plato's cave allegory. Socrates represents an epistemological otherness that is perceived as threatening to the normal Athenian self. Since Socrates will not repress his desire to question the social order and assimilate to the norm, he must be sacrificed. Modern democratic subjectivity is based upon a similar dynamic. Democratic personality is based upon the figure of the double. The double is the psychic mold of the majority. As Manent (1996) notes in his discussion of the democratic citizen, "the *semblable*⁶⁵ is an obstacle insofar as he is superior to him, insofar as he remains distinguished by any sign of *inequality*. The *semblable* is an obstacle to him insofar as he is not yet completely his double" (p. 61). The democratic citizen seeks to make the other into an image of the self, and imbues this effort with quasi-religious significance. Democracy thus sets itself the task of creating a world of universal self-reflection.

For another to perform the function of the double, the differential between self and other that is embodied in the other must be destroyed, or at least considerably reduced. Democratic peoples thus destroy otherness as they pursue an asymptotic trajectory towards an equality that is never fully realized, but that nonetheless exerts a significant and ubiquitous impact in that it brings about a form of monolithic mass subjectivity.

As Corey Robin (2004) notes, "the mass meant more than political congestion: it threatened to dissolve the very boundaries of the self.... So complete was each person's assimilation to the mass, it simply did not make sense to speak anymore of individuals" (p. 75). In this respect, Tocqueville's vision of the people differed from that of Hobbes. "Unlike the frontispiece of *Leviathan*, where the individuals composing the sovereign's

⁶⁵ The French *semblable* means "similar" or "fellow man."

silhouette insisted upon their own form, the canvass of revolutionary democracy depicted a gathered hulk, with no recognizable human feature or discrete part” (Robin, p. 75). In Tocqueville’s account, the democratic self has begun to decompose. Through their “debased taste for equality”⁶⁶ the people have created a monstrous entity that absorbs and destroys their selves. They have become the willing parts of an engine of mass assimilation.

Democracy, from a Tocquevillian perspective, makes heroism impossible because it liquidates difference, reducing everyone to a monstrous blandness in which the distinctions between monster, victim, and hero are eliminated. The democratic mass recreates the world in its own image, destroying the conditions in which heroic individuality and transcendent inspiration may arise. Nowhere is this more evident than in America, the land of the living dead masses. Thus the original zombie, as the New World monster, lacks the aristocratic sophistication, intelligence, individuality and sexiness of the European vampire. It has no supernatural powers or special skills, let alone personality. Indeed, the zombie is one with its generic mechanical functioning.

Marx also notes that modern subjectivity is based upon universal self-reproduction. The bourgeoisie “creates a world after its own image” (Marx, 1948/1997, p. 13). Individuals become automaton slaves of the machines of production, which dominate them physically and mentally. According to Fromm (1941/1994), “the person who gives up his individual self and becomes an automaton, identical with millions of other automatons around him, need not feel alone and anxious any more. But the price he

⁶⁶ Tocqueville makes the distinction between manifestations of the democratic “passion for equality” that are, on the one hand, good and proper, and, on the other, debased and excessive. He refers to the latter as the “debased taste for equality.”

pays, however, is high; it is the loss of his self (pp. 184). In modernity, doubling happens in a mechanistic fashion within a world dominated by machines.

Within the context of American popular culture, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* offers a vision of this process during the middle of the twentieth century. In this film, as individuals fall asleep they are copied, remade into emotionless units under the control of an invisible alien intelligence. *The Matrix* depicts a hyper-stylized version of this same phenomenon at the turn of the 21st century. Agent Smith, a computer program designed by the machine civilization to police the virtual selves of humans within the Matrix, goes rogue and begins to take over every self, remaking them in his own image. By the end of the third film, *Matrix Revolutions*, he has virtually colonized the Matrix. In the climactic battle, Neo, the hero, confronts an army of Smiths, which stand in uniform rows as far as the eye can see. Romero's zombie apocalypse will reverse this process, imagining the grotesque self-destruction of the automaton mass.

The Horrors of Solipsism

In Plato's cave, the prisoners cannot turn their heads to see their fellows; they stare straight ahead, transfixed by shadow play, and thus know nothing beyond their own illusory sensations. In Hobbes's state of nature, humanity is fragmented into a-social wolf-men. There is no communication or community in these horrific scenarios. Like Plato's prisoners and Hobbes's natural men, the members of Tocqueville's tyrannized mass are withdrawn and isolated. "Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest," Tocqueville writes (2004, p. 861). The democratic individual "exists only in himself and for himself alone" (p. 861).

For Tocqueville, the prison affects a “ruthless privatization of life” and thus represents “a microcosmic model for an atomized society” (Boesche, 1980, p. 552). “The one indispensable ingredient” of moral reform in the penitentiary is “the absolute isolation of the prisoner” (Boesche, p. 551). “Allegedly, the prisoner will be redeemed via self-absorption,” and thus “the prisoner is left continually in his own self-reflective company” (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, p. 66). However, there is a political component to this self-absorption. In the penitentiary, Tocqueville observes an intimate relationship between solipsism and despotism. “Like the quintessential despot, the superintendent of the penitentiary declares that ‘we must...come to a separation of all’” (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, p. 68). The warden, like the tyrant, seeks to prevent public association because it might lead to collective self-empowerment, unity and revolt.

Avrimento and Gingerich (2014) point out that prison authorities enforce “a religion that interiorizes the self and encourages the habits of brooding withdrawal from the community. In the penitentiary, religion encourages a solipsistic descent into the self...” (p. 65). However, enforcing solitude, Tocqueville notes, does not result in true reform of the prisoner (p. 66). In fact, solitary confinement produces “a terrifying solitude that goes ‘against nature’” (Boesche, 1980, p. 552). “Interviews with inmates revealed that solitude is ‘insufferable, ‘severe,’ a ‘terrible torment,’ and ‘horrific.’ It is, one prisoner concludes, ‘fatal to the human constitution; it will kill me’” (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014, p. 72).

“The collapse of the aristocracy and the emergence of equality tend to leave each person isolated and powerless – just as they are in prison” (Boesche, 1980, p. 554). The Americans are free from the oppressive European past and its traditional institutional

controls, but they are cut off from each other, weak, and powerless, and therefore susceptible to political tyranny. In democratic society, no single individual superintends the process of privatization. However, Tocqueville fears that isolated and withdrawn citizens will eventually fall into the hands of a despotic leader that acts exactly like the prison superintendent. Fixating upon private economic goals, neglecting politics and self-mastery, the people will separate, privatize and thus de-politicize themselves, creating a power void into which the tyrant will step. “At such times it is not uncommon to find a multitude represented on the world’s vast stage by a few men, just as in the theater. Those few alone speak in the name of an absent or inattentive crowd” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 631). Tocqueville wonders at how “a great people” can become the captives of a few “weak” and “unworthy” rulers (p. 631).

Romero will exaggerate the tyrannical nature of solipsism in his zombie mass. The zombie is absorbed within a private world of immediate sensation. Although the zombie is constantly surrounded by a mass of its fellows, it knows nothing of their lives.⁶⁷ Furthermore, in *Day and Land* Romero depicts his zombies as pathetic victims of despotic humans.

The Love of Money

That which drives the bodies of the materialistic Americans is their love of money. While all democratic peoples are moved by the desire for wealth, the Americans are exceptional in this respect; it is, according to Tocqueville, their dominant, national passion (2004, p. 723). Tocqueville’s democratic character resonates with Plato’s

⁶⁷ This is not always the case. Romero will begin to explore zombie subjectivity in *Dawn of the Dead*. In *Land of the Dead*, his zombies become revolutionary protagonists who overthrow villainous humans. However, as a general rule, the zombie is imprisoned within a solipsistic world of basic sensations.

oligarchic or “money-loving” character. The characteristic object that motivates both of these figures is money. Both repress non-economical desires, and neither pursue the sublime (or the Good, in Plato’s terminology); instead, they make reason a slave of acquisitive desire.

The Americans love wealth “not because their souls are pettier but because money in such circumstances really is more important” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 722). Social atomization makes money more important in America. Withdrawn into their small private worlds, they need money in order to stimulate social interchange. “When citizens are all independent and indifferent,” Tocqueville explains, “the only way to obtain their cooperation is by paying for it” (p. 722).

According to Marx (1964/1997), money “is the visible divinity” (p. 167). It “functions as almighty being” within capitalist society, where “the universality of its *property* is the omnipotence of its being” (p. 165). Money is “the bond of all *bonds*...the true *agent of separation* as well as the true *binding agent* – the *galvano-chemical* power of society” (p. 167). “But *that which* mediates *my* life for me,” Marx argues, “also *mediates* the existence of other people *for me*. For me it is the *other* person (pp. 165-166). Within modernity money remakes the entirety of psychic and social reality in its own image.

In America, the love of wealth is a universal motivation that determines the aims and means of citizens; a psychic force that drives each and every individual, including the wealthy. Unlike their aristocratic counterparts in Europe, the American rich develop a taste for material wealth in their long struggle to acquire it, and they never relinquish this psychic disposition once in it is in their possession.

Money is a jealous deity. It appears to make everything possible and thus becomes the primary object of desire. “Among aristocratic peoples,” writes Tocqueville, “money leads to only a few points on the vast circumference of desires; in democracies it seems to lead everywhere” (2004, p. 723). As “the principle or subsidiary cause underlying the actions of Americans,” the love of money “lends a family resemblance to all their passions” (p. 723). “This perpetual return of the same passion is monotonous, as are the particular methods that this passion employs to satisfy itself.” The American love of money “soon makes their image tiresome to behold” (p. 723). Like the passion for equality, the love of money is a psychic force that generates a generic form of selfhood.

In *Dawn of the Dead*, money has become worthless within the zombie apocalypse. Romero’s characters take money from the bank of the mall within which they have taken refuge “just in case,” but they only use it to play a game of cards. At the beginning of *Day of the Dead*, money blows uselessly through streets that have been overtaken by zombies, as a small group of soldiers and scientists hides within an underground bunker. In Romero’s zombie apocalypse, the almighty being of American capitalism – that which separates and joins individuals; that which creates them in its own abstract, universal image – has fallen.

Slave Labor

European aristocrats believe themselves to be “all soul and no body,” spiritual beings capable of divine transcendence (Lawler, 1995, p. 225). Untroubled by the need to work – they inherit their wealth – aristocrats pursue their grand ambitions and conquests of spirit. In contrast, “the American doctrine seems to say that all human beings are bodies in motion, so no different from the rest of animate nature” (Lawler, p.

226). America in the middle of the 19th century embodies the new spirit of constant economic motion and progress like no other land. Indeed, Tocqueville is struck by the fact that everyone in America works, a marked contrast to Europe (Avrimento & Gingerich, 2014). The Americans identify themselves as “free beings who work” (Lawler, 1995, p. 227)

The materialistic ontology of the Americans represents both a quantitative and a qualitative shift in thinking about the nature of the human. It represents a qualitative shift in that the body has become the locus of identification, ousting the soul from its distinguished supremacy within the aristocratic conception; and a quantitative change in that the average citizen – instead of the elite individual – is the object and advocate of the conception. Instead of honoring elite sublimity, American society endorses a utilitarian vision of bodies in motion.

Economic slavery is the dark side of the American doctrine. In *Narrative of the Life*, Frederick Douglass (1997) writes of how plantation life reduces the slave to a part of the rhythms and movements of the natural world, to a beast of burden, to a body that is “no different from the rest of animate nature” (Lawler, 1995, p. 226). Marx perceived a similar dynamic in the industrial factory. In *The Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* – completed in Paris four years after Tocqueville finished the second volume of *Democracy in America* – Marx (1964/1997) examined the wage-slavery of the industrial worker, arguing that “the worker’s activity...belongs to another; it is the loss of his self” (p. 111). Capitalist alienation animalizes the human, as “what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal” (p. 111). Marx elaborates:

man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. (p. 111)

Inverting reality, the industrial machinery of capitalism – through the simple, repetitious, mortifying movements that it demands – transmogrifies the human being into a mechanized brute. Under capitalism, the machine fuses itself to the body, draining the life of the worker, creating a world in which dead labor dominates living labor.

In *Pretend We're Dead*, Annalee Newitz (2006) argues that perhaps above all else, capitalist monsters represent the subjective experience of alienation...Alienation is what it feels like to be someone else's commodity, to be subject to a boss who 'owns' you for a certain amount of time. (p. 6)

Like the zombie slave laborers of *White Zombie* (1932) – who silently and robotically operate a Haitian sugar mill – Tocqueville's prisoners constitute a silent mass of hard-working slaves who offer no resistance to their masters. "Tocqueville describes 'the swarms of convicts who were working together in the open...in apparent freedom and in perfect silence...a spectacle that might inspire 'religious terror' in any lover of liberty'" (Avrinenko & Gingerich, 2014, pp. 76-77).

What the penitentiary – and, to an even greater extent, the Southern plantation – does to its slaves is a more brutal and excessive form of what American society does to all of its laboring subjects. Economic enslavement manifests itself differently on the plantation, in the penitentiary, in the factory, and within the home, but the underlying

dynamic is the same. Through Tocqueville's dystopic lens American society appears as a vast productive prison fueled by automaton slaves.

Several films have envisioned the horrors of automaton slavery within different contexts. Classic filmic representations include: the dull, uniform factory workers of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927); the apathetic voodoo zombies operating the Haitian sugar mill in *White Zombie* (1932); the emotionless collective of human copies in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956); and the robot housewives of *The Stepford Wives* (1975; 2004). The automatons in these films are humans who exhibit mechanical behavior; lack vitality, spontaneity, and individuality; and function in a thoroughly routine, monotonous and predictable manner.

Given that the self is conditioned and molded within the institutions of daily existence, it follows that we should find representations of the automaton within those very sites. Indeed, the automaton configuration is present in films that reveal the horrors of work (e.g., *White Zombie*), education (e.g., *The Faculty*), family and marriage (e.g., *The Stepford Wives*), the media (e.g., *They Live!*), small-town America (e.g., *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) and contemporary civilization as a whole (e.g., *The Matrix*). These films respectively depict factory workers, high school educators, suburban wives, consumers of the media, middle-class citizens, and humans in general as automatons. The automaton is thus a universal modern personality structure (Fromm, 1941/1994, pp. 183-184), but it is refracted through various social variables and institutions.

The Democratic Taste for Material Gratifications

There is a tension in Tocqueville's account of the democratic individual between what he calls the "passion for well-being" or the "taste for material gratifications,"⁶⁸ on the one hand, and the love of money, on the other. The former seeks to experience physical pleasure through consumption. The latter intellectualizes animal appetite, focusing the instinctual energies upon working and accumulating. We have seen how Tocqueville critiques the tyranny of intellectualized appetite in American society. Tocqueville is also "a moralist and theorist of the consumerist imaginary" (Jaume, 2008/2013, p. 84). As such, he provides a critique of the democratic desire for material goods, which will ultimately culminate in the grotesque collective desublimation of the zombie apocalypse.

According to Jaume (2008/2013), "Tocqueville consistently maintained the duality of soul and body" (p. 174). Tocqueville believes that these different aspects of the human seek out "two very different sources of satisfaction" (p. 174). The body gravitates towards the sensations and objects of this world; it pursues comfort and physical pleasure. The soul also "has needs that must be satisfied," Tocqueville proclaims (2004, p. 623). It contains "sublime instincts" that give humans "the taste for the infinite and the love of what is immortal" (p. 623). While the body hungers to taste the pleasures of this world, the soul yearns for the intangible and eternal realm. The ontological polarities of matter and spirit thus pull the human in opposite directions: one towards Heaven; the other towards Earth. For Tocqueville, as for Plato, the human exists

⁶⁸ As Jaume (2008/2013) notes, Tocqueville uses the "taste for material gratifications" and the "passion for well-being" interchangeably (p. 82).

at the juncture of the physical and the immaterial; the body and the soul; the earthly and the divine.

In regards to the impulses of the body, humans are, according to Tocqueville, much like animals. “The animals have the same senses as we do and nearly the same appetites,” he writes (2004, p. 638). “There are no material passions that we do not share with them, and whose seed cannot be found in a dog⁶⁹ as well as in ourselves” (p. 638). The similarity between humans and animals, in respect to material passions, is thus rooted in the nature of the bodies that they inhabit.

If humans and animals are united in their material passions, “why is it, then,” Tocqueville asks, “that animals know how to provide only for their primary and crudest needs, while we vary our pleasures endlessly and add to them constantly?” (2004, p. 638). “What makes us superior in this respect to the beasts,” he explains, “is that we use our souls to find material goods to which they are led by instinct alone. In man, the angel teaches the brute the art of achieving satisfaction” (p. 638). Animals are at one with instinct, which thus determines their behavior. Humans do not instinctively identify with desirable objects in a pure manner. They relate to those objects in a mediated fashion, through a reflective and creative process, which Tocqueville identifies with the soul. Due to this ability, humans “can multiply those same goods to a degree they [animals] cannot even begin to imagine” (p. 638). Using the power of the soul, the human can produce a world of great material abundance. Therefore in Tocqueville’s comparison of human and animal, although both possess bodies that are moved by instinct, the former procures the

⁶⁹ As Rossello (2012) notes, the dog also appears in Hobbes’s work. There it functions as a metaphor for the human appetite for knowledge.

objects that satisfy its earthly appetites by using the soul, whereas the latter moves, under the command of instinct, directly to the desired objects.

Tocqueville is not an ascetic who is opposed to the needs and desires of the body. On the contrary, he speaks of the “proper and legitimate search for well-being” (2004, p. 634). However, the bodily appetites are, in his view, not on equal footing with those of the soul. The soul and its sublime desires are superior to the body and its earthly appetites (Graebner, 1976). In this respect, Tocqueville agrees with the Platonic metaphysic. Summarizing Plato’s doctrine of the immortal soul, Tocqueville writes, “the soul has nothing in common with the body and lives on after it” (p. 636). This “was enough to give Platonic philosophy the sublime spirit that is its distinguishing characteristic” (p. 636).

The soul bestows upon humans a tremendous economic capability, but it is, for Tocqueville, much more than an economic tool. Its primary purpose is not to fulfill the desires of the body and build up the material world. The soul is of the other world; and it is that eternal, immortal realm to which it is drawn. Through the body, humans participate in the sensuous and appetitive life of the animal, attaching themselves to the objects and concerns of the material world; through the soul, they may lift themselves up to the plane of the angel, accessing sublime inspirations and spiritual insights; through its power they are “...capable of rising above the goods of the body and scorning even life itself, something of which the beasts have no idea whatsoever” (2004, p. 638). The human is thus, for Tocqueville, between the beast and the angel, and can move closer to one or the other category depending upon the type of society within which they live.

For the sake of clarity, one should distinguish between Tocqueville's view of human nature and his view of the self. The soul and the body each have their own in-built tendencies or impulses that cannot be destroyed, and which presumably will remain in place regardless of changes in society. However, the self is not fixed. It is a historical and social phenomenon. Human character varies according to the society in which it is formed and expressed. The social state of society – the socially predominant configuration of passions, beliefs, mores, etc. – gives rise to a particular character or personality structure. Thus we can speak meaningfully of an aristocratic and a democratic self.

Democracy and aristocracy – like the body and the soul – are moved by different desires, seek out different types of pleasure, and strive after different goals. The former is rooted in this world; the latter looks beyond it. Aristocratic peoples do not contemplate the goal of material gratification, and thus do not glut their souls with “petty and vulgar pleasures,” as do democratic individuals. In aristocracy, the nature of desire, and the corresponding social scene, are quite different than they are in democracy. Wealthy aristocrats pursue ambitious goals that take them far beyond the confines of mundane worldly affairs, while the suffering poor turn to God for spiritual satisfaction.

The aristocratic social structure produces a sublime effect upon its peoples; it stimulates the search for pleasures and goals that are above and beyond material acquisition. “In those kinds of society,” Tocqueville argues, “the poor man's imagination is diverted toward the other world. Though gripped by the miseries of real life, it escapes their hold and seeks its satisfactions elsewhere” (2004, p. 618). Aristocracy denies material gratification to the poor, and thus encourages them to search for immaterial

gratification. Poverty is, for them, a spiritual catalyst that activates a yearning for God. Aristocrats possess “grand passions,” directing their energies into ambitious practical accomplishments and intellectual pursuits. They dream, for instance, “...of building vast palaces, of vanquishing or deceiving nature, or of depleting the universe the better to gratify the passions of one man” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 620). They are capable of acts of great self-abnegation, neglecting the immediate needs of the body for a more transcendent or ambitious purpose. Discussing the difference between democratic and aristocratic selflessness, Lawler (1995) notes: “Human beings in democratic times might too readily welcome a way of surrendering their weak and contingent individuality. Aristocratic selflessness is a proud assertion of individuality approaching divinity” (p. 225).

Democratic peoples are driven by materialistic desires. “Any definition of democracy that does not count pleasure in well-being as its foremost aim will fail to do justice to Tocqueville’s thought” (Jaume, 2008/2013, p. 83). Indeed, you will not adequately understand the Tocquevillian conception of democracy, or monstrosity, without grasping the nature and consequences of this motivating force. It is what motivates democratic individuals into a never-ending process of working, earning money, and accumulating possessions. However, as I later discuss, democratic peoples restlessly pursue physical pleasure but do not allow themselves to experience it. The Americans intellectualize animal appetite, and thus never satisfy the taste for material gratification that drives them.

“Democracy encourages the taste for material gratifications,” argues Tocqueville (2004, p. 635). It transforms desire. Democratic individuals harbor “the desire to acquire

the goods of this world” (Tocqueville, p. 623), and orient themselves towards “the pursuit of comfort” (Lawler, 1995, p. 227). “Democracy takes pleasure in material goods, which feed or comfort the body” (Jaume, 2008/2013, p. 174). The body replaces the soul as the common locus of identification; its needs and desires rise to the surface of daily activity, even infiltrating religious sermons (Graebner, 1976). “Democracy promises ‘the pursuit of happiness,’ but that happiness is necessarily material in the first instance (although it may to some extent be diverted toward artistic, intellectual, and spiritual goals)” (Jaume, 2008/2013, p. 83). The spectacle of a host of individuals busily pursuing material acquisition is therefore “a striking and indelible feature of every democratic age” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 507).

The passion for well-being is middle-class: “It grows and spreads with that class; it becomes preponderant when the class does. From there it reaches up into the upper ranks of society and descends among the people” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 618). Middle-class values such as utility, industriousness, progress and acquisitiveness are found throughout the democratic population (Kaledin, 2011, pp. 371-372). All members of society subscribe to an ethic of work and consumption, focusing upon material objects as the sole reality and source of value. Democratic citizens are thus industrious workers and desirous consumers whose lives are defined by the world of commodities that surround them. This is why although “men who live in democratic times have many passions,” most of them “either culminate or originate in the love of wealth” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 722). Money mediates the democratic desire for things.

Although the passion for well-being has its place in life, it becomes a “defect of the heart,” the one that is “most commonly found in democratic peoples” (Tocqueville,

2004, p. 635). As the democratic defect of the heart, it generates certain characteristic but unfathomed dysfunctions in the democratic subject. Tocqueville fears that democratic man “may in the end lose the use of his most sublime faculties, and that, while bent on improving everything around him, he may ultimately degrade himself. There, and nowhere else, lies the peril” (pp. 634-635). Tocqueville speaks of democracy as a social form that animalizes the human. He worries that in focusing upon the body and its transient instinctual desires democratic individuals will become more like the animal and less like the angel; that they will weaken the soul and destroy the specifically human abilities that it makes possible.

As discussed above, Tocqueville holds that humans are able, through the power of the soul, to abundantly produce the goods they need and desire. This is what separates them from animals. In animals, the instincts direct the search for objects of need and desire; in humans, the soul is, or should be, in charge. If democratic peoples pursue their materialistic passions to excess, they will, Tocqueville anticipates, destroy the ability to produce. “Should men ever manage to content themselves with material goods,” he warns, “there is reason to believe that they would gradually lose the art of producing them...” (2004, p. 638).⁷⁰ Excessively materialistic individuals not only stand to lose the ability to produce their goods; they will also likely “end up enjoying them indiscriminately and without progress, like brutes” (2004, p. 638).

The birth of democracy, for Tocqueville, entails the death of the “grand passion” and the ascendance of an impatient utilitarian mentality. According to the utilitarian logic that the Americans so passionately employ, one must maximize material pleasures

⁷⁰ Indeed, in the 20th century American corporations will shift a great deal of the country’s production to other countries.

at the minimum of effort and expense. “Since the final goal is to enjoy, the means of attaining it must be quick and easy, for otherwise the trouble required to achieve the gratification would exceed the pleasure it afforded” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 626). Effort must not exceed anticipated reward. As a consequence of this utilitarian mentality, democratic individuals are incapable of investing much of themselves into any one project, and those that they do pursue are small and “petty.” “Often death is less feared than persistence of effort toward a single goal,” Tocqueville argues (p. 626). Instead of working towards a single goal, the Americans pursue an ever-changing array of improvements and pleasures. They seek “to add a few acres to one’s fields, to plant an orchard, to enlarge a home, to make life constantly more comfortable and convenient, to forestall want and satisfy the slightest need without effort and virtually without cost” (p. 621). Lacking the vision and ambition of the aristocrat, the American is unable to persevere in the struggle to do something great.

For Tocqueville, democracy leads the people down the tranquil path of the bourgeois norm. The "vehement" passions of the people are channeled into moderate and uninspired economic activity. “I reproach equality not for leading men into the pursuit of forbidden pleasures,” writes Tocqueville, “but for absorbing them entirely in the search for permitted ones” (2004, p. 622). Modern democracy absorbs citizens in the restrained, unsatisfied, and productive search for permitted pleasures.⁷¹ Restrained by intellectualized violence from venturing beyond the parameters of public opinion, democratic peoples, in Tocqueville’s account, tend to unvaryingly plod the path of least

⁷¹ Marcuse (1964/1968) will also discuss how citizens are absorbed in the search for permitted pleasures. Of course, the boundaries of permissible pleasure will expand over the course of the following century, as will the pleasures that subjects demand on their own terms.

resistance to the goods that make life more pleasant and comfortable, taking care not to overstep the common rule as they approach a herd-like future.

Democratic passions are not socially or politically disruptive, and on this point we are very far from the mass apocalyptic threat of Romero's zombies. “The particular taste that men in democratic centuries conceive for material gratifications,” Tocqueville explains, “is not by nature opposed to order. On the contrary, it often needs order if it is to be satisfied” (2004, p. 621). Democratic sensuality, which remains within the boundaries prescribed by majority opinion, not only requires order, it also reinforces it:

In democratic societies, the sensuality of the public takes on a certain moderate and tranquil style, to which all souls are required to conform. It is as difficult to escape the common rule by way of one’s vices as by way of one’s virtues. (p. 621)

Philosophical materialism is dangerous for Tocqueville because it encourages the mind to think only of the physical – of what is short-term, finite, and mortal; of that which will ultimately decay and perish. It fixates the mind upon material objects at the expense of the infinite sublime, producing philosophical shortsightedness and spiritual myopia,⁷² in addition to the aspects of animalization noted above. Therefore while the taste for material gratifications objectifies individuals within their practical affairs, philosophical materialism does so intellectually within their worldview. Both aspects of the democratic paradigm interact to root the individual within the physical dimension, constructing democratic subjects as anxious and unhappy bodies in motion, constantly in pursuit of external improvement and wealth. The taste for material gratification, in his

⁷² Democratic goals “are small, but the soul invests in them: it contemplates them daily at close range. Ultimately they block its view of the rest of the world and sometimes come between the soul and God (Tocqueville, 2004, pp. 620-621).

account, therefore initiates a self-destructive dynamic in which the human personality is destroyed and the inner brute comes forth.

Although the taste for material gratification troubles the soul – producing a state of mass psychic agitation, constant economic motion, and even a “wild ardor” for goods and riches – it does not result in disorderly conduct. “The love of well-being reveals itself to be a tenacious, exclusive, universal, but restrained passion” (Tocqueville, 2004, pp. 620-621). It does not drive individuals to break social taboos. Tocqueville does not find the monstrous debauchery of the wayward aristocrat within democracy. Marquis de Sade is the product of European aristocratic decadence and degeneration, and a libertine notion of freedom, not the result of the middle-class ethos of petty pleasure through work and consumption.

Nor does Tocqueville witness the excessive consumerism of the shopping mall zombies in *Dawn of the Dead*. The latter are the product of 1970s American consumerism. Indeed, after World War II, the American subject will begin to identify with consumption as opposed to production. The bourgeois demand for sexual repression in the service of production, which Freud focused upon, will give way to the post-modern injunction to consume and enjoy noted by Lacan. Paralleling this psychic transformation is the emergence of the Romero cannibal zombie from the man-machine. But in Tocqueville’s time, the Romero zombie is still contained within the bourgeois automaton. The animalization that democracy produces, in his account, is that of the docile beast of burden (e.g., the slave, the factory worker, the prisoner), not the beast of destructive consumption (e.g., the zombie consumer, the psycho-killer).

Tocqueville argues that America is a land of constant but superficial change. “The appearance of American society is agitated, because men and things are constantly changing; and it is monotonous, because all the changes are the same” (2004, p. 722). Advancing a theatrical analogy, he writes, “since the same successes and the same reverses recur constantly and only the names of the actors change, the play remains the same” (p. 722). Therefore although the Americans are constantly in motion, they do not truly act or create. They behave like the animate economic objects they believe themselves to be. The fast-moving, ever-changing surface of American society belies an inner death. Through their constant methodical activity, which produces nothing of great value, the Americans reproduce themselves as a living dead mass.

Tocqueville’s analysis speaks to the mechanistic conformity of post-World War II American society. Horkheimer and Adorno (1987/2002) argue that Tocqueville’s analysis “has been fully borne out in the meantime. Under the private monopoly of culture tyranny does indeed ‘leave the body free and sets to work directly on the soul’” (p. 105). They also envision a monotonous mechanical society:

The machine is rotating on the spot...nothing is allowed to stay as it was, everything must be endlessly in motion. For only the universal victory of the rhythm of mechanical production and reproduction promises that nothing will change, that nothing unsuitable will emerge. (pp. 106-107)

If humans focus their energies exclusively upon the external material world and the impulses connecting them to that world; if they make matter the dominant object of their desire and activity; if they restrict their search for happiness and satisfaction solely to the earthly domain; then they neglect their souls, and lose the possibility of rising

above the monotonous routines and rhythms of society, of doing something greater than merely chasing after money and physical pleasantries. Such a scenario will extinguish the great dreams and transcendent aspirations of the aristocratic past. Democratic peoples, unaware of their metaphysical essence, without interest in the divine, will be, according to Tocqueville, unable to follow the lead of the sublime instincts of their soul, and they will make themselves into brutes fit for tyranny.

Administrative Tyranny

Tocqueville argues that the taste for material gratifications harbors a despotic potentiality:

There comes a time when men are driven wild and lose nearly all sense of themselves at the sight of new goods ripe for the taking...in order to tend to what they call their affairs, they neglect the chief affair, which is to remain their own masters. (p. 630)

The passion for well-being, when excessive, overwhelms the senses and fixates the mind solely upon acquiring wealth. This causes individuals to lose sight of their economic interdependence. Non-economic tasks and goals are forgotten or repressed. More dangerously, citizens ruled by an excessive passion for well-being fail to remain vital, connected and free.

Tocqueville believes that a slavish orderliness will ultimately culminate in political despotism. "A nation that asks nothing of government but the maintenance of order," he warns, "is already a slave in the depths of its heart; it is a slave of its well-being, ready for the man who will put it in chains" (2004, p. 631). Animalization thus sets the stage for tyranny.

As Maletz (2002) notes, Tocqueville discusses three related but distinct forms of tyranny. In volume one of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville worries about “majorities taking control of the government” (Maletz, 2002, p. 760). This first type of tyranny is political. It approximates the traditional tyrannies of the past, except that the agent of tyranny is the majority instead of a singular tyrant like Plato’s wolf-man. The second type, discussed above, is “tyranny over thought or the spirit” (p. 759). The third type is administrative tyranny. In this form “bureaucratic centralization aims at the emasculation of alternative powers in the name of imposing administrative coherence or uniformity” (Maletz, 2002, p. 760).

Tocqueville elaborated upon this third type of tyranny within *The Old Regime*, but it is also present within the second volume of *Democracy in America*. As Kaledin (2011) notes, Tocqueville presents “subhuman images” of “human life reduced to inertia” (p. 355) under the tutelage of a monstrous bureaucratic apparatus at the end of *Democracy*. After “kneading” individual subjects “in his power hands, “ the sovereign “reaches out to embrace society as a whole” (2004, p. 819):

Over it he spreads a fine mesh of uniform, minute, and complex rules, through which not even the most original minds and most vigorous souls can poke their heads above the crowd...and in the end he reduces each nation to nothing but a flock of timid and industrious animals, with the government as its shepherd.

(p. 819)

Hobbes imagined his sovereign – the great Leviathan – as a monster-slayer and heroic savior of the people. Tocqueville inverts Hobbes’s narrative and imagery. What was for Hobbes a utopian vision of unity and harmony – the individual as a machine part

incorporated within a giant societal mechanism – becomes, for Tocqueville, a dystopian nightmare of collective imprisonment and tyranny. The sovereign has become an insidious tyrant that regulates and controls, down to the smallest of details, a pathetic flock. Hobbes’s man-machine has become a regular, orderly, productive, but pathetic shadow of a free and vital human being. The people have escaped the prison-like dilemma of the state of nature only to enter the prison-like existence of modern democracy, in which a centralized bureaucracy performs the role of the overseer. In this respect, Tocqueville believes that the modern democratic project will likely terminate in living death, even if it is able to keep the wolfish state of nature at bay.

In his monstrous portrait of centralized government, Tocqueville anticipates 20th century dystopian narratives like *1984* and *A Brave New World*. Both of these narratives feature an obedient mass that passively exists under the watchful eye of an all-encompassing bureaucratic order. While *1984* depicts a harsh world of total surveillance, thought control, and labor discipline, *A Brave New World* represents the softer side of dystopian slavery; its characters are pacified by state-sanctioned drugs, sex and various amusements. One can see both of these aspects of totalitarian enslavement within Tocqueville’s dystopian vision: psychic slavery and slave labor, on the one hand, and uncontrolled consumerism, on the other. In regards to the second aspect, Tocqueville does not witness a hedonistic society, but he does foreshadow such a society.

Like Tocqueville, Horkheimer and Adorno (1987/2002) discuss the relationship between a deadened mechanical self and tyranny. They fear “total integration” within an “administered world” (p. xi). “Enlightenment is totalitarian” (p. 4) because “technical rationality today is the rationality of domination” (p. 95). Marcuse (1964/1968) similarly

argues that “the productive apparatus tends to become totalitarian to the extent to which it determines not only the socially needed occupations, skills, and attitudes, but also individual needs and aspirations” (p. xv). Technology merges economics, politics and culture “into an omnipresent system which swallows up or repulses all alternatives” (p. xvi). “This containment of change is perhaps the most singular achievement of advanced industrial society” (p. xii).

However, Marcuse also believes “that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society” (p. xv). Oppressed and revolutionary groups –radicalized youth and minority groups, artists and intellectuals – embody this explosive potential. These are the very same groups that will celebrate *Night of the Living Dead*, a film that envisions the apocalyptic explosion of American society. Discussing *Night*, Phillips (2005) points out that “in 1970, its audience consisted of many of those students, intellectuals, and African Americans who had been, and some who still were, involved in the youth revolution of the late 1960s” (p. 92).

The Man-Machine Versus the Beast

In America, the rational self-control of the man-machine squares off against the animal appetites of the beast. The American doctrine of self-interest “is the doctrine of self-mastery or self-control” (Lawler, 1995, p. 227). According to this doctrine, “to be satisfied or content, to live according to nature in Rousseau’s sense, is to be unfree or less than human” (Lawler, p. 227). The Americans equate freedom with denial of the animal appetites. Only those who are free can rise above the natural necessity of the body. Attempting to uphold this ideal, “Americans claim to be free from brutish determination by natural impulse or imaginary illusion through the rational and willful calculation of

interest” (Lawler, p. 226). They espouse the idea that humans are bodies moved by self-interest into calculated acts of material acquisition. Like Plato’s oligarchic or money-loving character, they deny non-economic desires and uses the rational faculty primarily for the purposes of economic calculation. Within America, repressive self-control becomes a good in and of itself. The Americans take pride “in living a life that is unprecedentedly and inhumanly hard, one without any enjoyment or love” (Lawler, 1995, p. 227). They aspire to be hard-working machines.

Of course, repressive self-control conflicts with the taste for material gratifications. The Americans are not as self-possessed as they imagine themselves to be. They both hunger for and reject materialism. “The Americans take pride in the consistency of the doctrine of interest, but it actually is extremely inconsistent, a pridefully antimaterialistic materialism” (Lawler, 1995, p. 227). Their doctrine produces a profound tension within the self. It splits the self between the utilitarian ethic of the man-machine and the animal appetites of the beast. On the one hand, Americans identify with the body and its needs. They ceaselessly pursue material goods, comfort, and physical pleasure. On the other hand, they reject the animal appetites and attempt to contain them through rational calculation and self-denial.

The Americans flirt with beastly desire but do not consummate it. The beast generates their taste for material gratifications, but they intellectualize its instinctual energies, drawing it into a project of self-mastery and productivity. They do not allow the beast satisfaction on its own terms. Instead, they enslave it to the machinery of modern civilization. The instinctual desire to freely consume is thus frustrated by the

economic demand for robotic productivity. Consequently, Americans do not find a balance between reason and passion, work and enjoyment, matter and spirit.

The passion for well-being “anxiously stirs the middle-class heart,” generating a seemingly paradoxical dynamic: “The heart animated by love of comfort is always uncomfortable” (Lawler, 1995, p. 227). In a chapter titled “Why Americans Seem so Restless in the Midst of Their Well-Being,” Tocqueville paints a picture of a people made miserable by their unrelenting pursuit of material goods. “The taste for material gratifications,” writes Tocqueville, “must be regarded as the primary source of that secret restlessness revealed by the actions of the Americans and the inconstancy they exhibit every day” (2004, p. 626). “In democratic times,” as compared to “centuries of aristocracy... hopes and desires are more often disappointed, souls are more disturbed and anxious, and worries are more insistent” (p. 628). The majority of individuals are “both ardent and listless, violent and enervated” (p. 626). The passion for well-being provides a new ordering principle for daily life, but it generates inner turmoil, weakening and dissipating the psyche. It atrophies the capacity for mental concentration and sustained singular focus, releases a frustrated anxiousness, and threatens to reduce the human to a mechanistic brute. Thus Americans are scattered across the surface of their daily lives, busily chasing after an illusive happiness on the quick and easy.

Despite their desperate and never-ending search within a land of enlightened conditions, the Americans never reach their final goal of enjoyment. While their rational minds may continue to believe that work and accumulation will bring happiness, their bodies, full of melancholy and anxiety, tell another story:

In America I saw the freest, most enlightened men living in the happiest circumstances to be found anywhere in the world, yet it seemed to me that their features were habitually veiled by a sort of cloud. They struck me as grave and almost sad even in their pleasures. (p. 625)

The anticipated dividends of the utilitarian ethic are not forthcoming, and they consequently develop a morbid melancholy that hangs about them like foul weather. Their unhappiness is a result of the conflict between what their bodies desire and what their minds demand. Intellectualized appetite produces anxiety and restlessness, not freedom.

The Americans are not immersed in the reality of well-being (as most would understand the term) but obsessed with the idea of it. They “never stop thinking about the goods they do not possess” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 625), and suffer from a perpetual fear that they will lose what they do have. They are haunted by anxiety over absent objects, and thus forever on the move, and forever changing the object of pursuit. “The inhabitant of the United States...grasps at everything but embraces nothing and soon lets things slip from his grasp so that he may go chasing after new pleasures” (Tocqueville, p. 625). Here, one can sense the historical and psychological roots of what will become the zombie’s deep and insatiable craving, as self-denial turns into its opposite, perpetual self-indulgence.⁷³

⁷³ Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* is especially relevant in this respect. Set in one of the first shopping malls in America, the Monroeville Mall in Pennsylvania, several scholars have read this film as a critique of American materialism and consumerism. Matthew Walker (2010) specifically focuses upon the “graspingness” of the zombies. Drawing upon Aristotle’s use of *pleonexia*, the Greek notion of unlimited desire for goods, he argues that the unlimited desire of humans to consume while they were alive has reanimated them as bodies that are completely identified with this desire in death. Of course, the zombie reaches out for human flesh, not for material goods.

Tocqueville perceives an interactive dynamic between the taste for material gratifications and philosophical materialism, such that the former (when excessive) produces the latter, which then further strengthens the former. “If this taste becomes excessive, it soon leads men to believe that everything is mere matter” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 635). “The unappeasable acquisitive drive of the democratic temper,” writes Kaledin, “seemed to him likely to lead to a dangerously narrow philosophical materialism, against which the leaders of democratic societies would have to struggle” (2011, p. 373). Philosophical materialism “in turn adds to the forces that propel pursuit of those same gratifications with wild ardor” (Tocqueville, p. 635). In other words, the excessive taste for things results in a mentality that further inflames the underlying desire for those objects. The former produces the latter, and the latter then feeds back into and amplifies the former. “Such is the fatal circle into which democratic nations are driven. It is good for them to see the danger and pull back,” Tocqueville warns (p. 635).

Hobbes promotes a mechanistic materialism that focuses our attention upon this world. He envisions a well-regulated artifice within which machine bodies may pursue their economic self-interests. However, in doing so, he, from a Tocquevillian perspective, inadvertently amplifies the passion for material things that will generate the modern anxieties, degradations and decomposition of the democratic self.

Instead of pausing to enjoy life, the Americans perpetuate a self-imposed suffering through their constant search for happiness. Although they are not aware of it, the American doctrine implies that “this anxious pursuit is good in itself” (Lawler, 1995, p. 277). That is, they (unconsciously) identify their own unhappiness and anxiety as the good. They take pleasure in denying their animal appetites, struggling ceaselessly, and

inflicting discomfort as they work hard and make money. But if the Americans, at this point in history, take some form of intellectualized pleasure from masochistic self-denial and monetary accumulation, they will not do so indefinitely. By simultaneously cultivating and denying the desire for physical pleasure, they unknowingly play with instinctual fire. They tempt the beast from its lair but do not allow it to consummate its desire. Money and self-denial cannot keep its hunger for pleasure at bay. The instincts cannot be intellectualized indefinitely, at least not within the manner of the man-machine.

The principle of mechanistic self-control prevents the realization of the taste for material gratifications, but this victory is tenuous and impermanent. The desire to consume and enjoy – to commune with the beast – haunts the American psyche. In fact, efforts to deny the beast strengthen it. The compromised desublimation of the Americans – an erotic limbo in which they are uncomfortably identified with the things of this world – is not a steady state. As Plato long ago noted, the money-loving character will decompose into the pleasure-loving democrat, as self-controlled productivity implodes into uncontrolled consumption.

The Americans thus initiate a psycho-political dynamic that will eventually culminate in the zombie apocalypse. To deny the beast is to deny a life of vitality and creativity. “The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive toward destruction... *Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life*” (Fromm, 1941/1969, p. 182). The instincts cannot be intellectualized indefinitely, not without destructive consequences. The return of the repressed will not be a pretty sight. *Night* initiates the “body horror” or “splatter” subgenre, which depicts bodies being possessed by uncontrolled explosions of instinct, and revels in overwhelming spectacles of blood and

gore. In Romero's masterpiece, the beast will feast upon its human master, and finally enjoy the physical pleasure that was constantly provoked yet denied. The "pridefully antimaterialistic materialism" (Lawler, 1995, p. 227) of the Americans will become a guiltless display of uncontrolled debauchery. The repressed desire to sensuously enjoy the world will return to destroy it.

The Desire for Collective Transcendence

Aristocrats are deluded in thinking that they are "all soul and no body" (Lawler, 1995, p. 225). The Americans are subject to their own characteristic delusion in thinking that humans are "all body and no soul," that they are motivated by self-interest and nothing but. The solution to aristocratic delusion does not lie in the intellectualized appetite of the money-lover, and nor does it lie in the collective desublimation of the pleasure-seeker. It lies elsewhere, in the other world, in God.

The passion for well-being is "a confused and pitiable sort of love" (Lawler, 1995, p. 227). Those under its influence do not accurately identify the object of their pursuit, and thus they aim in the wrong direction. Those who are motivated by it think they are searching for money, but they are actually seeking the divine. The same is true of the taste for material gratifications. One cannot achieve spiritual satisfaction through physical pleasure. The love of money and the taste for material gratifications both aim at the wrong object. The money-lover and the pleasure-seeker are both slaves of the material world.

Democratic individuals pursue an impossible and unreachable goal: happiness through things, whether they are abstract (money) or concrete (commodities). They embark upon a never-ending quest towards a mirage. Thus the morbid melancholy and

“disgust for life” that Tocqueville perceives among the Americans. They are confused, frustrated and deeply conflicted by desires that point in opposite directions. While the desire for God pulls them towards Heaven, the desire for things (money and/or physical pleasure) pulls them towards Earth.

For Plato, the democrat’s love of physical pleasure – like the oligarch’s love of money, and the tyrant’s love of power – is a misguided use of eros. The Good, the divine source of reality, is the ultimate object of desire. The prisoners in the cave do not realize it, but they will only ever be happy and free in the divine sunlight of the world above. The philosopher is the only truly happy individual.

Tocqueville does not make a clear distinction between the love of money and the love of physical pleasure, which would correspond to the oligarch and the democrat in Plato’s narrative. But we can nonetheless see that these distinctions are present in his analysis of American society. He speaks of the importance of the love of money, on the one hand, and the taste for material pleasure, on the other. These are related but distinct forms of desire, as Plato demonstrated.

Tocqueville, who endorses the Platonic metaphysic, agrees with Plato that the ultimate aim of desire should be the other world, the divine, the immortal and infinite. The “unerotic character” of the American doctrine “depends on the thought that erotic longing or love is an illusion. But Tocqueville notices that the Americans really do have such longing. They long to love each other, to be immortal, and to love God” (Lawler, 1995, p. 228). Mixed in with the desire for money, and the growing taste for material gratification, is the desire for social connection and divine communion.

The Americans are deluded or unaware as to the discrepancy between their social and spiritual needs, on the one hand, and the nature of their practical activity and life philosophy, on the other. The latter two obstruct the realization of the former. Instead of directing their pursuits along sublime channels within the context of a balanced and integrated psyche, they assimilate to the mass, becoming restless and miserable workers and consumers. “By doing so, they seem actually to aim to divert themselves from their perception of the insatiability of their deepest longings, for immortality and God” (Lawler, 1995, p. 228). The pursuit of money and physical pleasure prevents Americans taking the lead of the sublime instincts of the soul. However, this diversion cannot continue indefinitely: “The Americans’ diversions become progressively less effective, and so they become progressively more miserable” (Lawler, 1995, p. 228). A people may deny the soul its satisfactions for a time, but not indefinitely. The only truly insatiable desire is the desire for transcendence, sublimity, and God.

The Americans’ confused mixture of desires will ultimately degenerate into the beastly consumption of the zombie apocalypse. In *Night*, Romero explodes the mechanical bonds of civilization. The zombies in this film embody a vitality and hunger that was absent in the automaton personality of the 1950s. Whereas Tocqueville’s democratic citizens constantly deny themselves, Romero’s zombies never do so.

If the misery of the Americans is solely the product of instinctual repression, then one would expect them to find satisfaction when the mechanisms of repression have been lifted. But we find exactly the opposite. In *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), the zombies no longer represent the resurfacing of submerged or absent energies. They “are not an exception to, but a positive expression of, consumerist desire. They emerge not from the

dark, disavowed underside of suburban life, but from its tacky, glittering surfaces” (Shaviro, 1993, p. 92).

The Americans did not find satisfaction in working and making money. Instead, they found the prison-like, internally conflicted, life of the automaton. But neither do they find satisfaction in unlimited consumerism. Zombies are never satiated, no matter how much they consume. Instinctual repression is gone, but the search for satisfaction continues. This suggests that Americans desire something other than material objects and the physical pleasure accompanying consumption. It also indicates that they have, absent a higher collective purpose, unleashed their vital energies in increasingly destructive forms of behavior. Indeed, the number and ferocity of zombies increases, and the predicament of humanity becomes more and more desperate, from *Night to Day*, where only a handful of humans remain in an underground bunker.

As Romero shows us in *Land of the Dead* (2005), the zombies, like his heroic human characters, are ultimately not interested in consumption; they desire peaceful sociality. In *Land* the zombies have evolved into a community. They begin to forsake pleasure in consumption for socialization and political unification. At the end of the film, they leave the human settlement, no longer interested in consuming flesh. As Clark (2010) notes, “instead of pursuing their appetite for flesh, the zombies have turned their backs on humans and are stumbling towards their new collective existence together” (p. 208). From this perspective, the zombie apocalypse reveals more than the desire for unbridled physical consumption. It reflects a desire for collective transcendence, for a new, vitalized form of social life.

Conclusion

In *Democracy in America* Tocqueville presents a nightmarish vision of the democratic future. He foresees a mass of hard-working, pleasure-seeking brutes that has called forth a monstrous bureaucratic sovereign. Here, Hobbes utopian vision of society as a gigantic mechanism has become a horrific nightmare of enslavement. Tocqueville's critical vision of the democratic mass incorporates many of the essential features of Romero's zombie horde: identification with the animal within; an enervated psyche; intellectual deficiency; uncontrolled consumption; mass conformity; and political tyranny. However, he shows the zombie figure at an earlier stage of historical development. More specifically, he depicts a tension in the American self between the man-machine and the monstrous consumer.

Tocqueville utilizes the American penitentiary as a horrific heuristic that reveals the monstrous nature of democratic society. The prison spiritualizes tyranny. It equalizes, isolates and mechanizes the self, making it susceptible to administrative enslavement. All that the prisoners have is the "petty pleasures" of labor, which they willingly embrace in order to escape from their isolation and boredom.

Democratic society, like the prison, internalizes or intellectualizes tyranny. The majority, instead of a warden, is the ultimate authority in society. But in both cases, the individual is made to do the work of repressive self-control. Democratic society, like the prison, is based upon a degraded form of equality. It levels society, producing a mass of generic individuals who are too timid and afraid to be individuals. It also separates and isolates citizens, producing a solipsism that is not only painful but also dangerous, for it

makes society susceptible to administrative tyranny. Finally, democratic society, like the prison, is based upon slave labor.

Tocqueville's democratic character, like Plato's oligarchic character, is driven by the pursuit of money. Democratic citizens passionately pursue a mechanical economic existence. Although Tocqueville fears passive mechanical enslavement, he also notes the presence of an unruly desire to consume and experience physical pleasure. He speaks of a taste for material gratifications. This is in tension with the orderly and slavish pursuit of money. He does not clearly distinguish between these two passions, and link them to two different historical forms of selfhood, but his analysis does align with Plato's character types. In other words, Tocqueville beholds the tension between the oligarchic or money-loving character and the democratic or pleasure-seeking character. He witnesses a time in which elements of the latter are appearing within the former. The Romero zombie will decisively capture the degeneration of the automaton into a monstrous consumer.

For Tocqueville, the democrat does not find satisfaction in the pursuit of money or material goods because he ultimately desires God. Like Plato, Tocqueville believes that the individual must ultimately turn towards the divine in order to find true happiness and satisfaction. Democratic humanity will become lost in materialism, Tocqueville believes, unless they follow the sublime instincts of the soul into the other world.

Chapter 6—*Night of the Living Dead*: Romero Revolutionizes the American Horror Film

The first thing our artists must do...and its not easy – is to wipe the slate of human society and human habits clean.

-Plato

Introduction

With his classic film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), George A. Romero revolutionized the horror genre and American monstrosity with a realistic, taboo-breaking depiction of America in the throes of self-destruction. Social authorities were no longer ever-triumphant good guys, but ineffectual and distant functionaries of a dying order. The monsters were no longer distant and exotic others, but your cannibalistic next-door neighbor. This film not only forever altered the horror genre, but also set the mould for the deluge of zombie culture that has inundated post-9/11 America. The zombies of this film are now part of the collective imaginary of American society. In this chapter, I explain the cultural and political significance of *Night*, and establish why Romero is a canonical theorist of monstrosity. *Night* offers a window into the political history of America in the late 1960s, as well as a powerful symbol with which we may understand the nature of subjectivity under capitalism more generally. As a work of canonical monstrosity, *Night* speaks to the same themes that my other monster theorists grapple with, including automaton slavery and beastly appetite.

Night is widely acknowledged to be not only the foundational text in the zombie subgenre, but also one of the greatest, most frightening and most revelatory works of modern horror cinema. Featuring graphic depictions of zombies feasting upon dead

humans, and a scene in which a zombie daughter eats her father and kills her mother, *Night*, like *Leviathan* and other taboo-breaking works, provoked moral outrage among some critics. *Variety* magazine argued that “until the Supreme Court establishes clear-cut guidelines for the pornography of violence, ‘Night of the Living Dead’ will serve quite nicely as an outer-limit definition by example” (as cited in Hervey, 2008, p. 16).

Like Hobbes, Romero presents a scenario in which fearful, isolated humans attempt to form a community in the absence of government in order to survive the nightmarish assault of beastly human predators. *Night* is set in a farmhouse in rural Pennsylvania. It tells the story of a group of individuals that struggles to survive the zombie apocalypse. For some unknown reason, dead bodies of American citizens are reanimating, driven solely by the desire to consume living humans. Throughout the film, the characters argue and fight, unable to communicate or cooperate effectively, as the zombies amass outside. At the height of tension and conflict amongst the humans inside the farmhouse, the zombies break into the farmhouse. In the morning, Ben – the sympathetic black protagonist, the only one who has survived the night – is shot in the head by a posse of white men that is sweeping through the countryside in order to contain the zombie threat and reestablish order.

Unlike typical horror films of the time, *Night* is a brutal documentation of ordinary, flawed humans. None of its main character survive. And although it appears that the posse has contained the zombie outbreak at the end of the film, we are left feeling that the social order is not worth saving. Made at a time of category crisis and great civic unrest, Romero ruthlessly critiques the dominant institutions and norms of American society – including the family, marriage, race relations, the news media and the

government – showing them to be unworthy of survival. In fact, he captures the dissolution of the American subject and social order. I connect this dissolution to my ongoing canonical narrative, arguing that, from the perspective of Plato’s degeneration narrative, Romero captures the rebellion of the oligarchic youth within the context of 1960s American society. That is, the repression and conformity of the 1950s generated the “return of the repressed” in the form of the 1960s counterculture, which explored, often to excess, the non-economic desires that the older generation had denied in order to produce and accumulate wealth.

In *Night*, Romero demolished the distinction between normal self and monstrous other. He produced a universal form of monstrosity within the context of modern America, thus surpassing the gothic singularities that previously dominated the genre. In his films the monster is within us all. For Romero, we must critically examine and consciously address – but not repress – the beastly appetite that drives our bodies and so often leads to violent and divisive behavior.

Cultural Significance

Although disparaged at the time of its release by *Variety* as “pornography of violence” and a “sadistic orgy” devoid of any artistic merit, *Night of the Living Dead* is now considered a “modern classic” of horror cinema (Gagne, 1987, p. 37). It has been widely acknowledged by critics and scholars as one of the greatest and most influential horror films of all time. “This was a film that dragged American horror kicking and screaming into the modern age,” writes Jamie Russell (2005, p. 65). Kim Paffenroth claims “Romero’s first zombie movie is one of the great success stories of film history”

(2006, p. 27). And Peter Dendle exclaims “Romero is the Shakespeare of the zombie, and this is his *Hamlet*” (2000, 121).

“With its unmitigating horror,” writes Paul Gagne, “*Night of the Living Dead* is generally accepted as one of the most frightening films ever made” (1987, p. 21). It is ranked the fifth scariest film ever made by the Chicago Film Critics Association (Soares, 2006),⁷⁴ while Stephen King lists it as one of the “ten or a dozen” films that truly scared him (Kane, 2010, p. xii).

In addition to scholarly and critical praise, *Night* has received institutional recognition. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) of New York City screened *Night of the Living Dead* in its *Cineprobe* program in 1970, introducing Romero as a promising new director. It later acquired the film in 1980 (Phillips, 2005, p. 82). In 1999, *Night* was added to the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress, at the direction of the National Film Preservation Act, as an American film that is “culturally, historically or aesthetically significant” (“Librarian of Congress,” 1999). In 2001, it was ranked number ninety-three on the American Film Institute’s “Top 100 most thrilling American films” (Paffenroth, 2006, p. 28).

Night is best known for being the quintessential zombie film. As Greene and McIntosh (2008) note, it is “the classic, definitive zombie film” (p. viii). Within the context of the subgenre, this was the film that began “the rebirth of the zombie” (Flint, 2009, p. 7). It introduced the zombie as the monster of the American masses: your next-door neighbor, returned from the dead, travelling in mass formation, hungry for your flesh. As McIntosh notes,

⁷⁴ The top ten on this list are: *Psycho*, *The Exorcist*, *Halloween*, *Alien*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *Jaws*, *The Shining*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Dawn of the Dead* and *Rosemary’s Baby*.

Night...ensured that zombies would in many ways replace the classic monster types and science-fiction creatures as one of the most popular, widespread monsters in popular culture, permeating movie practice in various subgenres, as well as the popular lingo of the day in situations ranging from insurance fraud to computer use. (McIntosh, 2008, p. 8)

The influence of *Night* continues into the present moment. “When one speaks of zombie movies today,” writes Paffenroth, “one is really speaking of movies that are either made by or directly influenced by one man, director George A. Romero...Romero’s landmark film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), has defined the zombie genre since its release” (2006, p. 1). Indeed, “there’s still a big market for movies in the mold of *Night of the Living Dead*, in which a group of people fight for their lives against a zombie attack” (Greene, 2008, p. ix).

Night’s images of cannibal corpses laying waste to society have resonated profoundly with Americans, not only inspiring the flood of recent zombie films, but also the many other forms of zombie culture that have appeared in the post-9/11 period.

Synopsis

Night of the Living Dead opens with a shot of a brother and sister, Johnny and Barbara, driving across rural Pennsylvania on an overcast day. The siblings have travelled 200 miles in order to enact the annual ritual of laying flowers upon the grave of their dead father. The black-and-white scene is accompanied by ominous music, a simple series of notes that evokes an eerie mood and foreshadows the terrors with which the viewer will be assaulted in the coming frames.

Johnny turns into the cemetery and parks the car. As they are exiting the vehicle, the car radio turns on of its own accord, a foreshadowing of the chaotic animation of the inanimate that will soon begin to assault the viewer. A segment of a news report is heard, but Johnny turns it off before we are able to hear what is being discussed. In the film's first line of dialogue, Barbara notes that it is light for eight o'clock due to Daylight Savings Time. The siblings approach their father's grave. Barbara kneels and places flowers on the grave, after which thunder is heard and rain begins to fall. A man appears in the distance, shuffling in their direction. Johnny sees the man and teases his sister, upsetting her with a Boris Karloff impersonation, what David Flint (2009) calls "one of the most portentous lines in film history" (p. 76): "They're coming to get you, Barbara!" He continues his act by jesting that the man is "one of them." Barbara is irritated and turns to apologize to the man. The man, now much closer, lurches at Barbara and grabs her, a crazed look in his eyes. Johnny struggles with the attacker and falls to the ground, knocked unconscious or dead as his head hits a tombstone.⁷⁵ His monstrous jest has become a deadly reality. Barbara flees from the graveyard as the man gives chase. After a harrowing chase sequence, accompanied by anxious Gothic music, she takes refuge in a nearby farmhouse.

Barbra enters the dark and sinister dwelling,⁷⁶ locks the door and takes a knife from the kitchen. Entering another room, she is startled by stuffed animal heads hung upon the wall. Barbara goes upstairs where she encounters a rotting corpse on the landing. Horrified by the sight of the corpse, she runs downstairs and opens the door to

⁷⁵ Flint (2009) says the man "kills Johnny" (p. 76).

⁷⁶ Maddrey (2004) states that when Barbara enters the farmhouse is where "the unnatural framing and jagged editing of a backyard horror movie disappear and the story begins to unfold in the style of a documentary newsreel" (p. 123).

find the glaring headlights of a truck approaching the door. A black man, Ben, comes out of the truck, holding a tire iron, and approaches the door.⁷⁷ It is now night and there are several figures in the yard of the farmhouse shuffling slowly towards them. Ben pushes Barbara back into the house. The ghoulish figures surround the truck and use rocks to smash its lights.

Inside the farmhouse, Ben tells Barbara that he can handle “those things” and heads outside where he kills two of them by repeatedly bashing them in the head with the tire iron. More of them move towards Ben. He sees one inside the house, approaching the unaware Barbara from behind. Ben goes inside and kills the “thing” and drags it outside. Barbara’s anxiety rises and Ben yells at her: “Don’t look at it!”

Barbara sits traumatized on the couch, passive and motionless, while Ben sets about barricading the house. He drags a chair outside and lights it on fire, which frightens the attackers. After boarding exterior windows and doors, Ben lights a cigarette and tells Barbara how he arrived at the farmhouse. Barbara reciprocates, describing her experience in the cemetery. She becomes increasingly hysterical in the telling, eventually screaming that they must leave the farmhouse and find Johnny. She hits Ben, who in turn punches her. Barbara becomes catatonic and remains so until the end of the film.

Ben searches the farmhouse, finding a radio, a rifle and bullets. He turns on the radio and they listen to a broadcast that describes the ghoulish figures as “an army of assassins” and “misshapen monsters.” Ben finishes boarding up the house, goes upstairs, and drags the corpse into a room to remove it from view.

⁷⁷ Several commentators note the significance of Ben’s blackness. To cast a black man in the role of the hero in 1968 – and then to have none of the other characters even mention this fact – was highly unusual (Kuhns, 2013).

A younger man (Tom) and a middle-aged man (Harry Cooper) emerge into the living room from a previously unnoticed door leading to the basement. They have been hiding in the basement with three other individuals: Judy, Tom's girlfriend; Helen, the wife of Harry; and Karen, the daughter of Harry and Helen, who is now barely conscious after having been bitten by one of the attackers. Ben is angry that they did not come upstairs and help him and Barbara. Harry claims that he did not know what was going on upstairs, that the commotion could have been the monstrous figures. Harry and Ben argue about where it is best to hide out, beginning an egotistical rivalry that will prevent the group from cooperating and surviving the night. Harry wants to stay in the basement, while Ben thinks it is a "death trap" and prefers to stay upstairs. Tom advocates cooperation.

Ben finds a TV and turns it on. Authorities reveal that the monsters are reanimated corpses that are eating their victims. The broadcast speculates that this may be the result of "mysterious, high-level radiation" from a space probe that was returning from Venus. The broadcast advises people to go to rescue stations, not to stay indoors as was previously recommended, and local rescue stations are listed. It is recommended that bodies be burned so that they will not reanimate.

Ben initiates a plan to travel to a rescue station. Tom and Ben are to go outside, get into the truck Ben drove to the farmhouse, drive it to a gas pump on the property, refuel the truck, come back to the house, pick up the others, and drive to the nearest rescue station. Harry is to throw Molotov cocktails from the upstairs window in order to provide cover for Ben and Tom. The plan begins to fall apart as soon as they emerge from the house. Judy, at Tom's request, had agreed to stay inside the farmhouse and wait

for him and Ben to return. She instead runs after them, driven by her fear of losing Tom. The three make it to the pump, but Tom spills gas on the truck. The torch, which Ben had placed on the ground, catches the truck on fire with Judy inside. Tom gets back into the vehicle and begins to drive it away from the pump. Tom stops the truck in order to get out, but Judy's jacket is caught on the seat. He tries to help her, but the truck explodes, killing them both.

Ben makes his way back to the house, warding off reanimated corpses with the torch, but Harry refuses to open the door. Ben forces his way into the house and, in a rage, strikes Harry to the floor. Outside, a group of the living dead greedily feasts upon the charred remains of Tom and Judy.⁷⁸

Inside the farmhouse, the remaining characters watch the search and destroy mission of Sheriff McClelland and his posse on television.⁷⁹ The Sheriff assures the reporter that the monsters will be destroyed in the near future. The farmhouse lights go out and the living dead begin to fight their way inside. Ben sets down the rifle in order to help reinforce the barricades. Harry picks it up and orders his wife into the basement. She refuses. Ben and Harry struggle for the gun. Ben wrests it from Harry and shoots him in the chest. Harry stumbles into the basement. The living dead hordes – who have been threatening invasion throughout the course of the film – finally break into the house. Corpses grab Helen as she attempts to hold the barriers in place. Her scream resuscitates

⁷⁸ “You could actually see what they were eating,” Roger Ebert wrote of this sequence. Indeed, Romero zooms in on extras gnawing on actual lamb organs and intestines (Gagne, 1987, p. 32). This is our brutal introduction to the cannibal zombie. “It was gory, it was distressing and it was innovative enough to dominate the genre’s development forever. From that moment onwards cinematic zombies would almost always be flesh-eaters” (Russell, 2005/2008, p. 68).

⁷⁹ In Vietnam, U.S. soldiers went on search and destroy missions to annihilate the communist opposition. In *Night*, the Sheriff and his posse set out on their own mission of annihilation.

Barbara who jumps up and helps free Helen from the clutches of the living dead. Helen retreats into the basement.

In the basement, Karen, who is now a reanimated corpse, feasts upon the severed arm of her father. Helen refuses to accept what her daughter has become. Karen corners her mother and stabs her in the chest with a garden spade fourteen times.⁸⁰ Upstairs, Barbara is also doomed by her refusal to acknowledge that her brother Johnny is now a member of the living dead. The monsters break through the humans' defenses and enter the farmhouse. The corpse of Johnny grabs Barbara and pulls her outside into the living dead horde. Ben, the last of the living, realizes that his only option is to abandon the upstairs, which is now swarming with the living dead, and retreat to the basement. Karen comes up behind him from the basement. He throws her aside, enters the basement, and locks the door. In the basement, Ben shoots the reanimated Harry and Helen in the head, and waits out the night.

The following morning Ben is awoken by the sounds of gunshots and barking dogs. The Sheriff's posse has reached the farmhouse. Ben emerges from the basement into the morning light and is shot in the head by one of the posse members, at the command of the Sheriff, who presumably assumes that he is a reanimated corpse. The film ends with a series of still photographs of the posse members using meat hooks to drag Ben's body to a pile of other corpses that are being burned.

⁸⁰ "The highpoint of horror...has to be when little Karen Cooper, newly Undead, proceeds to devour her father's arm and lay waste to her mother with a trowel. There is something uniquely disturbing about an innocent child turning into a brutal flesh-eating monster" (Larkin, p. 15). Similarly, Shaviro refers to this scene as "the film's high point of shock" (p. 89).

Reception

Night premiered on October 2, 1968 at the Fulton Theater in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was shown in a limited release, on the drive-in circuit and at neighborhood theatres, along the East Coast of the United States until early 1969. *Night* took audiences by surprise, generating enthusiastic fan responses alongside shock, outrage, and intense controversy amongst critics. After a highly successful European run in 1969, the film returned to American cinemas in 1970, where the countercultural youth made it one of the country's first "midnight movies." In the same year, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City screened it and introduced Romero as a promising young director. Whereas *Variety* magazine castigated *Night* during its initial release for indulging "pornography of violence," fans, critics and intellectuals, after its return to American cinemas, hailed the film for being effective shocker, beautifully horrific art, and political revelation all in one. Redefining the landscape of American horror and monstrosity, *Night* began its career as the iconic emblem of the contemporary zombie.

Night's initial release is mired in controversy. The film's distributor, Walter Reade Organization, marketed it to theatres to be shown at both evening screenings and Saturday afternoon matinees. At the time, theatres regularly screened B-movie horror films at matinee double features, where the audience mostly consisted of children and adolescents (Phillips, 2005, p. 83). The typical contemporaneous horror movie was anything but horrific. Sterile and unthreatening, it featured predictable narratives in which good guys defeated rubber monsters from the bowels of the earth, or metallic robots from another world. Parents, young audiences, and critics were thus completely unprepared for Romero's ghastly visions of cannibal America. Furthermore, the Motion

Picture Association of America (MPAA) – a panel that labels submitted films according to their age-appropriateness – did not institute its current ratings system (G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17) until November of 1968. The makers of *Night* thus did not submit it for a rating, and nor did theatres expect such a rating at the time of its release. Children bought tickets, and entered theatres, without contest or concern.

A young Roger Ebert, in his commentary for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, famously described his viewing of the film in the presence of children, a review that is often cited by scholars to demonstrate its intense impact upon critics:

I don't think the younger kids really knew what hit them. They'd seen horror movies before, but this was something else. This was ghouls eating people – you could actually see what they were eating. This was little girls killing their mothers. This was being set on fire. Worst of all, nobody got out alive – even the hero got killed. (as cited in Gagne, 1987, p. 36)

Children were not the only ones who felt assaulted by *Night*. Fans of horror were also shocked by what they saw. Frank Henenlotter, director of horror cult classics like *Basket Case* and *Frankenhooker*, recounts his viewing of the film at a drive-in in Valley Stream, Long Island:

We sat in that car feeling as trapped and claustrophobic as the people in that house, blindsided by what was obviously the most potent horror film of the '60s since *Psycho*...

I didn't feel like we'd spent an evening at the drive-in; I felt like we'd been assaulted. (Kane, 2010, p. 30)

Although *Night* became “an unqualified hit on the drive-in circuit,” it was shown irregularly and reached a limited audience during its initial release, thus limiting its broader success (Gagne, 1987, p. 36). However, over the years, *Night* eventually “conquered the American horror audience with slow and steady progress. It became one of those “forbidden” films that grew in popularity based on word of mouth and controversy (Phillips, 2005, 83-84). Sensing the historical significance of the film, or simply responding to its power to shock, viewers became enthusiastic fans of the work.

Not everyone appreciated *Night*'s horrific beauty. Like the *E.C. Comics* Romero consumed as a youth in the Bronx in the 1950s, *Night* was the target of intense moral condemnation (Gagne, 1987, p. 36). “Review of *Night of the Living Dead*,” published on October 16, 1968 in *Variety*, portrayed the film as a sign of utter debasement and corruption: “Until the Supreme Court establishes clear-cut guidelines for the pornography of violence, *Night of the Living Dead* will serve nicely as an outer-limit definition by example” (as cited in Hervey, 2008, p. 16). This film “casts serious aspersion on the integrity and social responsibility of its Pittsburgh-based makers” and raises “doubts about the future of the regional cinema movement and about the moral health of filmgoers who cheerfully opt for this unrelieved orgy of sadism” (p. 16).

Although *Psycho* shocked audiences and outraged certain critics, what its murder scene reveals – a raised knife striking down; the terrified eyes of the female victim; blood splattering on the wall – is relatively innocuous in comparison to *Night*'s violence and gore. Two scenes in particular shook audiences. After the failed attempt at escape, a group of zombies feast upon the charred remains of the film's young lovers, Tom and Judy. In the other infamous scene, what Shaviro (1993) calls “the film's high point of

shock” (p. 89), zombie Karen “cannibalistically consumes her parents” (p. 90). Getting up from the table upon which she has been lying in pain throughout the film (due to a zombie bite), she feasts upon the severed arm of her father, and then repeatedly stabs her mother in the chest, to the point of death, with a garden spade.

Mainstream movies with high levels of violence – like *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) – and horror films with graphic gore – like *Blood Feast* (1963), and the British gothic horror films produced by Hammer Film Productions – were appearing at the time, but *Night* took realistic gore and psychic terror to a new level. Romero “removed the campy and overly colorful silliness of previous graphic violence and presented it instead within a stark and harsh realism. The documentary-style filmmaking removed the distance between the audience and the savage cannibalism portrayed on the film” (Phillips, 2005, p. 85).

The warnings and condemnations did not hurt *Night*, but conversely helped it at the box office. Ebert’s original commentary for the *Chicago Sun-Times* was condensed and republished in *Reader’s Digest* in June of 1969 under the title “Just Another Horror Movie – Or Is It?,” bringing national attention to the film. According to Gagne, this piece “helped the film immeasurably by arousing curiosity on a national level” (1987, p. 37). However, despite the drive-in success and increased attention, *Night* was not yet considered a classic of horror, nor was it yet interpreted as allegory or social metaphor. Such interpretations would come a few years in the future, after the film’s success in Europe (Gagne, p. 37).

After running for approximately a year, *Night* left American cinemas and opened in Europe, where critics and audiences embraced it enthusiastically (Phillips, 2005, p.

85). It was one of the highest-grossing films in Europe (Gagne, 1987, p. 36). Indeed, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that *Night* was the top-grossing film across the continent in 1969 (Dillard, 1987, p. 15). It filled theatres in France, Italy and Spain, running for eighteen months at the largest cinema in Madrid. According to Rex Reed, it was translated into 25 languages (Hervey, 2008, p. 17).

Night did so well in Europe, and in America when it returned in 1970, in part due to intellectual endorsement. European film critics – unlike their American counterparts – viewed horror films as culturally significant: “Whereas American critics have traditionally passed off horror films as an embarrassment to the industry,” explain Gagne, “British and French critics have gone to the opposite extreme, analyzing horror films for their social and cultural significance” (1987, p. 36). European film journals like Great Britain’s *Sight and Sound*, and France’s *Chaiérs Du Cinema* and *Positif* praised *Night* (Gagne, p. 36; Hervey, 2008, p. 17). They were quick to connect it to contemporary political themes and events like racism, violence, alienation, family breakdown, and the resurgence of conservatism in America. These political interpretations created a prism through which audiences interpreted the film (Hervey, pp. 20-21). However, there is an error in the standard narrative of *Night*’s reception: European film critics were not the first to embrace it as a work of art. Andy Warhol’s circle was the first to do so (Hervey, p. 18).

Night was rereleased to American cinemas in 1970. It ran in midnight movies and drive-ins throughout the country, appearing on the second half of a double bill that it shared with the blaxploitation film *Slaves* (Gagne, 1987, p. 36). Enhancing its reputation and critical clout, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) of New York City screened *Night*

as part of its *Cineprobe* program, introducing Romero as a promising new director (Phillips, 2005, p. 82). Ebert, who had initially warned of the terror experienced by children watching the film, gave it a more positive evaluation. From being castigated as an “unrelieved orgy of sadism” by *Variety*, to being screened and praised by MoMA, *Night* had run the critical gamut.

Night was made in bad taste, but it was made well. It benefited from its status as gruesome horror and political art. While Romero spoke at the MoMA, it played the gritty grindhouse theatres of New York City’s 42nd Street. As critics re-evaluated their perspectives, it drew crowds of the young and disaffected to midnight screenings at the Waverly theatre in Greenwich Village (now the IFC Center), popularizing the countercultural “midnight movie” phenomenon. “The midnight movie phenomenon *celebrated* youth and rebellion: it was about staying up past bedtime, roaming the streets while regular citizens slept, and, usually, about defying good taste,” explains Hervey (2008, p. 8). “Those that played longest were often prized for transgression and abnormality, like *Freaks* (1932) and *Pink Flamingos* (1972) (whose cannibal feast pays tribute to *Night*)” (p. 8).

Thus by the early 1970s, thrill-seekers, countercultural youth and intellectuals were celebrating *Night*. At the center of this success and popularity was its historical and political meaning and significance. *Night* utilized narrative innovations and realistic gore to probe and reveal collective anxieties:

The film’s success...has not only been commercial, but also critical. Reviewers began to recognize that the film did not just shock and disgust, but that it

disturbed and perplexed viewers, and demanded more of them at some deeper, more thoughtful, and more introspective level. (Paffenroth, 2006, p. 28)

As viewers felt in their guts, Romero and his collaborators had captured the zeitgeist of the nation, creating one of the first contemporary horror films (Waller, 1987, p. 2), and giving birth to “the archetypal incarnation of the radicalized postmodern zombie” (Mohammad, 2010, p. 93), the monster of the hungry American masses.

Bringing Home the Horror

The terror, outrage and love that *Night* variously provoked among audiences and critics was a product of its brutal examination of the psychic and political horrors of ordinary reality (Dillard, 1987, p. 17). “Whereas traditional scary movies used to mask reality in order to make it horrible, Romero strips the flesh off of it, revealing its grim and sick bones” (Maurizi, 2004, Meeting Necessities section, para. 6). “Romero takes his gore directly from the interstices of Western Civilization” and “puts it back in its place, at the heart of the empire, where it is systematically deleted” (Horror as Historical Concreteness section, para. 5). The horror of Romero’s film arises from the brutality of the Vietnam War, the political repression of Civil Rights protesters, the fragmentation of the counterculture; that is, from the various aspects of self and societal dissolution.

Night demolished the genre convention of representing monstrosity as foreign, of masking our horror in the guise of the other. “In the 30s,” notes Robin Wood, “horror is always foreign” (1986/2003, p. 77). *Dracula* (1931) – which scholars generally consider to be the first American horror film – famously begins in Transylvania, Romania, with Bela Lugosi, a Hungarian actor, portraying the undead Count (Maddrey, 2004, p. 11). The remainder of the story unfolds in London, the location of several other 30s horror

films, including *Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) and *Werewolf of London* (1935). When monsters are not located in existent foreign lands, they are situated in fictional ones, such as Skull Island (*King Kong*, 1933) and Frankenstein Village (*Frankenstein*, 1932; *Bride of Frankenstein*, 1935; and *Son of Frankenstein*, 1939).⁸¹ For the most part, the films of the 1940s maintain the foreignness of horror (Wood, p. 77).⁸² The monsters of 30s and 40s cinema – Frankenstein, Dracula, Mr. Hyde, the Mummy, the Wolf Man, etc. – are, as Paul Wells puts it, “mythic, European and of an ‘old world’ order” (2000, p. 62). They are products of the Gothic tradition, not homegrown figures (McIntosh, 2008, p. viii).

The monster films of the 1950s, at the level of setting, present a decisive break with the 30s and 40s, as they take place not in foreign countries, but within the United States, and thus locate the monster within the home order of the viewer. Films featuring extraterrestrial invaders (e.g., *The Thing from Another World*, 1951; *Invaders from Mars*, 1953), giant creatures (e.g., *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, 1955; *The Monster that Challenged the World*, 1957), and giant mutated insects (e.g., *Them!*, 1954; *The Deadly Mantis*, 1957) are all set domestically.⁸³ Although the monster films of the 50s are set within the borders of the United States, they do not, for the most part, explore the horror and monstrosity of the familiar world of the viewer. The monsters in these films are

⁸¹ Lugosi once again depicts an evil foreigner in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932) – set in Paris – and *White Zombie* (1932), which takes place in Haiti. *The Mummy* (1932), unsurprisingly, is set in Egypt. The only exceptions to this rule of locating horror and monstrosity within foreign regions of the world in the 1930s appear to be *Doctor X* (1932), *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933) (Maddrey, p. 15), and the second half of *King Kong*, which are set within New York City.

⁸² The settings of these films include Wales (*The Wolf Man*, 1941), the West Indies (*I Walked with a Zombie*, 1943), New Mexico (*The Leopard Man*, 1943), England (*The Uninvited*, 1944), and Scotland (*The Body Snatcher*, 1945). New York City is the setting for *Cat People* (1942), while its sequel *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944) takes place outside of the city in Tarrytown, New York. However, Irena – the woman who in *Cat People* presumably transforms into a panther when she experiences powerful emotions – is from Serbia. *The Seventh Victim* (1943) and Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) – which depict horrors within the everyday life of U.S. citizens, are notable exceptions. However, the dominant trend of the 1940s is to construct horror as foreign in location and cultural association.

⁸³ *The Thing* is set in the Arctic, but all of the human characters are American (Wood, 1986/2003, p. 78).

represented as foreign invaders that come from the unknown spaces of nature: aliens from outer space, gigantic creatures from the depths of the ocean, or mutated insects from subterranean habitats; they are not depicted as part of the ordinary world of the viewer, let alone as the normal self. They enter the circle of light cast by our national campfire, but they continue to appear as singular, bizarre, foreign entities that are ultimately repelled by heroic authorities.

American horror films prior to *Night* – and many that follow – thus present the monster as a strange “it” which breeds in foreign lands or exotic spaces. Romero is not the first to turn his gaze upon the monstrosity within the American self. In *Invasion*, monstrosity takes the form of a mass of ordinary American citizens. However, the American heroic ideal is still alive in the figure of Dr. Miles Bennell. Although he is “feminized” in relation to the symbolic order, Dr. Bennell is nonetheless an upstanding man who is able to save the day.⁸⁴ In a novel twist, we learn that Neville in *Last Man* is, in the minds of the vampires, a monster, for he slaughters them during the day while they sleep. This film thus places the human protagonist in the position of the monster, and challenges the normal separation of these two categories.

Psycho (1960) makes a significant contribution to the emergence of the monster within the intimate spaces of daily American life. “In *Psycho*,” writes Joseph Maddrey, “we recognize the monster’s world as our own, and the monster as an inherent part of it” (2004, p. 48). The monster of this film is not a suave vampire from Transylvania, a rubber monster from the bowels of the earth, or a metallic robot from another planet –

⁸⁴ Bishop (2010) sees things differently: “...Finney’s novel is surprisingly optimistic; faced with the resilience of humanity, the invading pod-people decide to abandon their plans and move on. The film’s ending, however, departs drastically from the novel, implying an eventual victory for the aliens and thus illustrating the paranoia rampant in Cold-War America” (p. 102).

typical enemies of the social order in prior horror and science fiction films of the times. On the contrary, Alfred Hitchcock's monstrous figure, one of the most memorable and influential psycho-killers in the history of cinema, is a young, handsome American man.

Psycho punctured the veil of cinematic safety by locating terror in the everyday world of the American viewer, specifically within the mind and family dynamics of a man (Anthony Perkins) who would typically be seen in the role of the romantic lead at the time. The family was no longer the suburban idealization of *Leave It to Beaver* (1957 – 1963), but a painful memory dividing, torturing and driving the son to murder. Quiet and unassuming on the surface, Norman Bates is in reality possessed by the memory and voice of his dead mother.⁸⁵ He maintains her skeleton – dressed and seated in a rocking chair – in the basement of their old California-gothic mansion, which is set back from the motel that he runs during the day. This was not a story of social authorities defeating the Evil Other in order to uphold the symbolic order, but a shocking and disturbing exploration of troubled American citizens who break the law, commit murder, and, perhaps worst of all, violate gender norms. (Norman cross-dresses, wearing the clothes of his mother when he murders Marion).

Eight years later, Romero took his turn at shaking up the genre. According to R. H. W. Dillard, “The essential quality of the film's setting and of its characters is their ordinary nature” (1987, p. 17). *Night* depicts the ordinary world of the viewer in a raw and realistic aesthetic. Made for \$144,000⁸⁶ by no-names from Pittsburgh, it was a low-

⁸⁵ In Creed's (1993/1994) psychoanalytic reading, Norman is a victim of the castrating mother, one of the classic configurations of the “monstrous feminine.” His “desire to become the mother is motivated not by love but by fear: he wants to become the mother in order to prevent his own castration – to castrate rather than be castrated” (p. 140).

⁸⁶ *Psycho* was made in 1960 for approximately \$800,000. *Rosemary's Baby*, the other prominent horror film released in 1968, had a budget of \$2.3 million. Furthermore, the makers of *Night* received approximately half of the \$144,000 after the film was completed, while the start-up capital was only

budget affair shot on gritty, black-and-white film, featuring unpolished sound and naturalistic lighting. The location was rural Pittsburgh⁸⁷: a graveyard, empty fields, a simple farmhouse; not meticulously crafted Hollywood sets. All of the actors save two were nonprofessionals, not famous Hollywood regulars; none were recognizable at the time; all of them depicted characters ordinary in appearance and flawed in behavior. Local residents portrayed the news reporter, posse members and zombies in the film (Gagne, 1987, p. 30). Audiences thus felt as if they were experiencing the documentation of a traumatic real-life event, not viewing carefully staged theatrics: “This wasn’t Hollywood gloss: it felt *real*. Many used words like ‘documentary’ and ‘newsreel’ to describe *Night*’s style” (Hervey, 2008, p. 20). In Romero’s film, the dead bodies of normal humans return to life within the everyday environs of the viewer, as the psyches and society of the living disintegrate under the pressure of a cannibal apocalypse.

Romero thus forgoes all manner of geographical and spatial distantiation. His monsters do not enter our world from another dimension (*Friday the 13th*) or come from outer space (*The Thing*). Nor do they dwell in foreign countries (*White Zombie*) or breed in specific geographical regions or ecosystems (*Jaws*). They are not linked to a particular town or neighborhood or house (*Halloween*). And nor are they confined within a supernatural site like the graveyard (*Pet Sematary*), a structure like the coffin (*Dracula*), or an object like the car (*Christine*). Although the zombie first appears in a graveyard in the opening scene of *Night*, it usually does not come from, and in general it is not associated with, the graveyard, as is its cannibalistic predecessor, the ghoul. Romero

\$6,000. Each of the ten individuals (including Romero) who formed Image Ten contributed \$600 (Hervey, 2008, p. 9).

⁸⁷ One of the prisons that Tocqueville visits is Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia (Avrinenko & Gingerich, 2014, p. 63). Interestingly, *Night* and *Dawn* are both filmed in Pennsylvania. In *Dawn*, characters flee from Philadelphia as the zombie apocalypse commences.

releases monstrosity from the circumscribed sites, areas, and regions within which it is contained in the vast majority of monster narratives, and shows it permeating and destroying the social order. In the zombie apocalypse, monstrosity spills out of its ghettoized mythic regions and virally infects normality, eradicating the separation of monstrosity and humanity.

Romero merges monstrosity with the world and self of the viewer. The zombie is found anywhere and everywhere a human may be or has been. It comes from the neighbor's house, or your living room. Where there is human, there is zombie. His zombie apocalypse thus inverts the traditional mapping of humanity and monstrosity: an ocean of monstrosity surrounds tiny, isolated pockets of human survivors. Furthermore, Romero does not merely state that zombies have taken over the human world; he shows potent images of zombie infestation, portraying them invading and devouring the intimate micro spaces and collective institutional sites of the viewer's world. In this respect, his zombie apocalypse differs from the apocalyptic scenario of *Last Man*.

Romero's characters and viewers do not enter a magical or mythic locale, experience traumatic sights and sounds, and re-emerge into a safe and uncontaminated space of normality. We enter into, and never escape from, a world in which monsters have completely surrounded humanity. Characters in zombie narratives often discuss and/or search for a rumored uncontaminated region, but do not find such a place. There is no safe space, no uncontaminated center in which the rules of a pre-zombie world reign. The sub-genre as a whole tends to refuse sanctuary, even as its characters desperately search for a cure or solution. Romero depicts a world in which monsters have completely surrounded humanity, and show no signs of letting up. Our world

breeds monsters; and we are those monsters; and there is no escape from this horrific fact. The human has become the abnormal and fantastic exception to the universal domination of the monster.

Several films after *Night*, even revolutionary and groundbreaking works set domestically, continue to spatially separate humanity and monstrosity. In *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), for example, horror emanates from an old home that is set back from the highway. Director Tobe Hooper, crafting a dark fairy tale, brings the audience from the ordinary world of light and regularity into a horrific space inhabited by psychotic cannibals. However terrible the experience might be, monstrosity is limited to a particular area, and there is no apparent danger that it will spread across the land. Characters and viewers are frightened and perhaps traumatized, but the normal world remains intact outside of the nightmare space.

The Breakdown of Containment

Modern monster narratives are variations on a basic theme: abnormal figures threaten or rebel against civilization. As Stymeist (2009) points out, “monster movies collectively represent various threats to the survival of industrial civilization, and in the vanquishing of the monster, the supremacy of the technological and ideological infrastructure of modern life is reaffirmed and valorized” (p. 395). The degree to which monstrous rebellion is taken differs depending upon decade, sub-genre, and monster. Romero’s zombie films are remarkable for the degree to which they embrace the annihilation of humanity and civilization. In his zombie apocalypse, monstrosity is no longer an isolated or containable phenomenon.

The monster movies of the 1950s anticipate the downfall of monstrous containment that *Night* will realize in 1968. In alien invasion films like *The Thing From Another World* (1951), the American military discovers and destroys a hostile being from outer space. The atomic monster and big bug pictures are more sophisticated in that they imply that the true threat to civilization is militarized science, not abnormal bodies. In these films gigantic creatures (e.g., the prehistoric beast in *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*) or swarms of giant mutated insects (e.g., the ants of *Them!*) invade and begin to destroy major metropolitan centers like New York City or Los Angeles. Although these narratives suggest that the apocalyptic self-destruction of American society is on the horizon, they do not locate the source of the threat within the normal self of the viewer, and they do not depict apocalypse. The monsters in these films threaten to completely overrun civilization, but scientists and soldiers are able to destroy or repel them at the conclusion of the narrative. These films suggest that monstrosity is containable; and that normality is more or less intact.

Whereas the giant creature films envision non-human invaders as apocalyptic threats that are ultimately terminated, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) depicts an invisible alien intelligence quietly overtaking the small fictional town of Santa Mira, California. Individuals are copied as they sleep, becoming uncanny representations of their former selves, units in a conformist automaton mass. However, the traumatized hero, doctor Miles Bennell, is able to alert authorities in a nearby town at the conclusion of the film. An alien presence has permeated Santa Mira; it has abducted the bodies of citizens (including the romantic interest of Bennell), destroying individuality and freedom in order to fashion a mechanical mass. However, monstrosity will not overtake

the country. It will be stopped, at least for the time being. Again, we have been warned, and perhaps somewhat traumatized, but not ruthlessly contaminated and consumed.

In the 1960s, American horror cinema enters an apocalyptic phase. In *The Birds* (1963), birds mysteriously begin amassing and attacking the human inhabitants of Bodega Bay, California. The birds force the humans, first, to seek refuge in a house and, at the end of the film, to leave town. In *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) – a filmic rendition of Richard Matheson’s novel *I Am legend* – a bacterial plague has turned humans into vampire-like beings; these creatures surround the home of scientist Neville Chamberlain, the titular last man, as he is haunted by memories of his dead wife, and searches for a cure to the plague. Like *Invasion*, *The Birds* and *Last Man* both depict “creatures that attack in massive numbers and strive (and sometimes even manage) to replace the human race” (Bishop, 2010, p. 104), a scenario that Romero will utilize. In *Night*, Romero infuses the human mass monstrosity of *Invasion* with the destructive energy of the giant creature. His cannibal zombies are broken-down automatons, reanimated into agents of the apocalypse by a deep instinctual hunger.

The Birds and *Last Man*, unlike monster movies of the 1950s, do not contain the monster. However, neither do they annihilate the world of the audience; the threat they present is limited in scope and intensity when compared to that of *Night*. In *The Birds*, the monstrous invasion occurs within a single town, and the destruction of human life and property does not reduce civilization to a state of nature. Although the monstrous threat is much more serious and expansive in *Last Man* – we are told that the living dead have overtaken the planet – we are not shown the apocalypse with the “rawness, brutality and grinding naturalism” of *Night* (Hervey, 2008, p.10). Furthermore, *The Birds* and *Last*

Man focus upon the plight of an isolated individual or group. For the most part, they are fascinating existential dramas that explore interpersonal or intrapersonal psychological dynamics. They cast a shadow upon the American dream (Phillips, 2005, p. 100), but they do not show it being devoured. Nor do they critique such institutions as the news media, the military, and local law enforcement, as does Romero in *Night*.

In some of the zombie films prior to *Night*, zombies break free from the control of their masters and revolt. In *Night*, there is no longer a master. The system has lost its ability to control its subjects. Social authorities do not know what is happening and they do not control outcomes. Monstrous rebellion is taken to its extreme conclusion. According to Pagano, the zombie signals “the end of the world as we know it. Insofar as they usually represent the catastrophic end of the *human habitus*, then, zombie films can be called ‘apocalyptic’” (McIntosh, 2008, p. x). In his zombie films, Romero screens the chaotic and uncontrollable emergence of monstrosity throughout American society. He replaces the standard containment narrative with one in which an increasing number of increasingly violent hordes of dead subjects overrun and destroy American civilization. His zombie apocalypse narrative depicts the complete infiltration and decomposition of civil society. He reverses the traditional temporal and spatial dynamics of horror, telling a story of utter human failure in the face of an unstoppable proliferation of monstrosity, thereby insisting upon the incorporation of the monstrous knowledge born by his zombie agents.

Night establishes the narrative template of the zombie apocalypse. Dead corpses begin to mysteriously reanimate at an exponential rate, killing and eating humans, dissolving society into a scenario that resembles Hobbes’s state of nature. The zombies

of *Night* quickly invade and colonize their narrative environment, forcing a small group of beleaguered humans to take refuge in an isolated farmhouse. As tensions within the farmhouse escalate, zombies break in and retake the defended human space. *Night* is somewhat of an exception to the narrative reversal that Romero will portray in each of his subsequent zombie films, for in the final moments of the film it appears that Sheriff McClelland and his posse of zombie hunters have contained the incident, and that the human community will reclaim their world from the zombies. However, earlier in the film we were informed that the zombie outbreak happened throughout the eastern third of the United States, and we are never told the outcome of national containment efforts. But even if the zombies are contained at the end of *Night*, and the humans reassert their control over their world, this victory is tenuous and temporary, as *Dawn* will make clear. Furthermore, there is a significant sense in which the zombies have won, for they have taken the farmhouse and claimed all of the main characters except for Ben, who is killed by the Sheriff's posse. And as Maddrey (2004) notes, "the militia members are scarcely more empathetic than the zombies, and we are left without hope for the future" (p. 124).

Screening American Self-Destruction

Night's apocalyptic narrative reflected the violence, destruction and chaos of American society in the late 1960s. It was made "during one of America's darkest hours – at the height of the Civil Rights era, on the eve of the Tet offensive in Vietnam" (Maddrey, 2004, p. 122). While *Night* played in American theatres in 1968, disturbing images from the Vietnam War and incidences of domestic unrest assaulted the American psyche: "The American television news was bloodier and more graphic than ever before, and citizens were confronted with the horrific images of war as never before," writes

Phillips (2005, p. 89). “Images of war dead, bombings, napalm, political assassinations, and violent protests filled the American media, promoting the view that America was on the edge of a violent cultural civil war” (p. 89). Two prominent progressive leaders – Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy – were assassinated in 1968, while various law-enforcement officers from the police and the National Guard committed acts of violence against protestors.

Some of the greatest works of political theory – as well as some of the greatest works of horror – are created in liminal times, times of great violence and confusion. On the threshold of life and death, old and new, human and monster, they give birth to new visions of self and society. The widespread unrest and violence in late 1960s American society was symptomatic of such an in-between time. As *Night* was screened throughout the country, American society was self-destructing. The violent, gory, and shocking nature of *Night* – its apocalyptic nature – was not the product of the deranged minds of its creators. It was first and foremost the product of a deranged, imploding social reality.

A few years after the release of *Night*, commentators began reading the film as a critical allegory of 1960s American society. “Romero offers us allegory, in which zombies turn out to be all too human,” writes Pagano (2008, p. 85). According to Romero, he and his fellow filmmakers did not consciously intend allegory. Yet he also admits that they discussed political events, and had revolution on their minds, as they created the film (Gagne, 1987; Monument, 2009). As Phillips (2005) argues, “whatever Romero’s objections that he did not intend *Night of the Living Dead* as a cultural critique, it is clear that the film rakes up many contemporary cultural issues and anxieties” (p. 93). Maddrey also addresses this tension: “On its most ambitious level – and this is a level

that Romero wisely tried to avoid in the text of the film itself – *Night of the Living Dead* is an indictment of modern life in America” (2004, pp. 123-124). Ultimately, it does not matter how conscious Romero was of what he was doing. His work speaks for itself. Zombies critique and reveal irrespective of his intentions.

Night revolutionized the horror genre and American monstrosity by tapping into and responding to current anxieties and fears. The old gothic monsters did not speak to the traumatic images that infected and traumatized the modern body politic. “How could an aristocrat from Transylvania or a crazy scientist be much of a worry when petrol bombs were exploding in the street and madmen were picking off civilians from tall buildings?” (Flint, 2009, p. 7). Romero’s zombies “represented modern fears” (Flint, p. 7). Mohammad connects them to “the pervasive specter of nuclear annihilation and the increasing spasms of unrest among various underclasses” (2010, p. 93). They tapped into the fear of apocalypse, the sense that society was self-destructing, that the events of the time were the death throes of the social order. According to Maddrey (2004), *Night* conveys the anxieties of life in a time of theological and political uncertainty, suggesting that we as a nation are overwhelmed by faceless, irrational and blindly destructive forces, and are incapable of creating a united front to drive them back. (pp. 123-124)

The zombie “spoke directly to audiences who felt that civilisation was collapsing around them,” and represented “a feeling of mass helplessness” (Flint, p. 7). Indeed, whereas previous films like *Invasion* and *The Birds* anticipated apocalypse, *Night* realized it. In *Night*, “the end had begun” (Phillips, 2005, p. 100). And “Romero’s apocalyptic take on the genre has marked it ever since” (Pagano, 2008, p. 71).

“The destructive power” that Romero deploys in his films “carries the traces of *self*-destruction...as both social disaggregation and dissolution of the Self. (Maurizi, 2004). In other words, *Night*’s non-stop psychic assault reflects the nightmarish dissolution of self and society in late 1960s America. As Plato’s degeneration narrative makes clear, human monstrosity is the product of an excess of beastly desire, which intensifies as society and its corresponding character types disintegrate on the path to tyranny. Democracy comes into being when the oligarchic youth question the economical ways of their parents, begin to indulge in the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, and eventually overthrow the oligarchic order through violent revolution. The automaton subjects of the 1950s – the “industrial man,” the “organization man,” the “one-dimensional man,” the “totally patternized man,” the automaton conformist, the alienated housewife, etc. – lead a passive, dull existence that demonstrates to their children the need for exploration in the opposite direction. Just as Plato’s young oligarchic becomes a drone that turns against and preys upon its parents, zombie Karen, at the end of *Night*, eats her father and kills her mother, a chilling metaphor for the intergenerational conflict occurring at the time.

Within the framework established by Plato, the Romero zombie represents a point in American history when the repressive ideological and infrastructural machinery of civilization can no longer keep the non-economic desires of the beast at bay, thus the sexual, cultural, and political rebellions, innovations and dysfunctions of the 1960s. Phillips notes the hedonistic or pleasure-seeking quality of the 60s rebellion:

Forged within the optimistic hedonism of the counterculture, these various movements seemed to coalesce into an overarching ‘youth revolution,’ which

aspired to overturning the institutions of their parents' society and forging something new, a culture founded on freedom, enjoyment, and love. (Phillips, 2005, p. 87)

Indeed, this sounds very much like Plato's depiction of the oligarchic youth, who see the flaws in their parents narrow, economical ways, and thus move towards the opposite extreme, embracing an excessive pursuit of pleasurable consumption, instead of excessive self-control and productivity. Whereas *Dawn* will examine the excessive consumerism of the democratic mass – offering a critique of commodity fetishism that includes comic, colorful portrayals of shopping mall zombies – *Night* is a bleak, dark portrait of psychic and political breakdown.

According to Phillips, *Night* “acted as a kind of eulogy to the revolutionary spirit that had mobilized, unified, and ultimately divided a generation of Americans” (Phillips, 2005, p. 93). “By the end of 1968...the counterculture movement was becoming fragmented and divisive, the peace movement was becoming increasingly violent, and the hope of a peaceful future seemed lost” (pp. 85-86). Those who celebrated *Night*, as it returned to American theatres in 1970, were the rebellious youth, radical minorities, and artists and intellectuals who now had a “more cynical attitude” after their violent, divisive and confusing experiences (p. 86).

Like other great works of horror, *Night* depicts a fragmented world in which individuals do not know is happening to them. The world of *Night* is claustrophobic, with characters passively confronting “larger mysterious forces” (Freeland, 2000, p. 225). Characters and audiences alike are mystified and terrified by the zombie phenomenon.

No one knows how or why re-animation is taking place (McIntosh, 2008, p. 9).⁸⁸ Unlike the 50s monster movies, there is no all-knowing scientist to explain what is happening. “We learn that, whatever is happening, the entire nation is at risk and nobody – not the newsmen, not the scientists and certainly not the politicians – can provide an explanation or a solution” (Maddrey, 2004, 123). Institutional authorities, representatives of the old order, are thus no longer containing the monster.

The big bug and giant creature films of the 1950s had demonstrated that American institutions – specifically, science and the military – were responsible for breeding monsters. Their creatures were the product of atomic radiation. For example, nuclear testing by the American military awakens the dinosaur-like creature from *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, and generates the giant mutated ants of *Them!*, while Godzilla attacks society with radioactive breath. These films often contain explicit or implied warnings against hubristic science and experimental overreach. Scientists, Frankenstein-like, have played God with the forces of nature, developing nuclear weapons without sufficiently reflecting upon their apocalyptic threat. Some things should remain unknown and untested, we are told, lest we summon our own destruction. However, implicating the military-scientific establishment is not the same thing as depicting it in a monstrous light, let alone showing the entire social order – its institutions, values, and ideals – as dead and ineffective. The heroic figures in the 50s films – brave military men and knowing scientists – are ultimately capable of destroying the monsters that they have created.

⁸⁸ “One of the great mysteries of Romero’s zombie films is just why the dead return...No answer is ever settled upon” (Walker, p. 85).

In contrast to the 50s monster movies, *Night* takes a much more critical stance towards the social order. “Aligning itself in direct opposition to the dominant American patriarchal order of family, community, police and military, *Night of the Living Dead* suggests that the whole of society is rotten to the core” (Russell, 2008, p. 69). Russell argues that a “maggot-ridden, flesh-eating putridity” has “crawled back from the grave to jab a decomposing finger of blame at us all” (p. 69).

Scholars often note *Night*'s suspicious and critical view of government representatives, including members of the U.S. military and local law-enforcement officials. Phillips (2005) believes one of the themes of the film is “distrusting authority” (p. 97). “Military and scientific officials seem more interested in bickering about explanations – arguing over whether the mutations were caused by radiation from a space probe – than providing for the survival of the citizenry” (p. 97). McIntosh connects the zombie apocalypse scenario more generally to the distrust in government of those growing up in the nuclear age. In zombie movies and games since, the source of the outbreak is often government or corporate experimentation (2008, p. 9).

Unlike his future zombie films, *Night* “is focused on the nuclear family” (Shaviro, 1993, p. 90).⁸⁹ It depicts every familial relationship as severely flawed. The neurotic Johnny and Barbra are brother and sister. Their father is dead, and their mother is absent. They bicker in the graveyard before Johnny is slain by a zombie. Harry and Helen Cooper, the only married couple, hide in the basement with Karen, the zombie-bitten and “implicitly” abused daughter (Shaviro, p. 89). When Harry and Helen are on-camera

⁸⁹ His future zombie films will focus on consumerism (*Dawn*), science and the military (*Day*), female empowerment (the re-make of *Night*), capitalism (*Land*), digital media and the internet (*Diary*), and feuding patriarchs (*Survival*).

together, they share no warmth, but instead disagree and argue. Karen speaks two words of dialogue: “I hurt.” At the end, she consumes her parents.

Of Romero’s first three zombie films, *Night* is most susceptible to conventional psychoanalytic interpretation, for it is focused on the nuclear family...Familial relations are shown throughout to be suffused with an anxious negativity, a menacing aura of tension and repressed violence. In this context, the zombies seem a logical outgrowth of, or response to, patriarchal norms. (Shaviro, p. 89)

From a psychoanalytic perspective it makes sense that “the film’s high point of shock comes...when the little girl, turned into a zombie, cannibalistically consumes her parents (p. 89). Like the oligarchic youth in Plato’s narrative – who destroy oligarchy and bring about democracy – Karen embodies the return of the repressed in a destructive, and ultimately cannibalistic, fashion.

In another movie, Tom and Judy, the sappy young lovers, would bring hope for the future of normality. They would survive and provide a point of identification for the normalized audience member. In *Night*, they are barbequed in a car explosion and then eaten by zombies.

Ben is the heroic figure in *Night*. He is the only character who is unattached to any traditional family relationship, and the only one who survives the night (Wood, 1986/2003). He invests his time and energy in an effort to protect the group and ensure their survival (except when he kills Harry at the end, after Harry attempted to lock him out of the house). However, Ben is killed at the end of the film. In this respect he is unlike the typical hero, who defeats the monster and survives.

Commentators and fans often note the historical and ideological significance of the fact that Ben, a black man, performs the hero function in *Night* (even if he is compromised by violence and stubbornness, as some have argued). Ben is killed by the white posse, which reestablishes social order (at least temporarily). Ben may be seen as a threat to the norms and social relations of white patriarchal society. According to Newitz,

Night is in many ways an updated version of [*The*] *Birth [of a Nation]*, except this time around the upwardly mobile black man is the film's hero, rather than its locus of evil and terror... Ben's death, *Night* persuades us, is a result of white presumption, not righteousness. (2006, p. 109)

Unlike D. W. Griffith's story of racist whites who pretend to be ghosts in order to terrorize and disempower monstrous blacks, Romero's narrative takes a positive but realistic view of Ben: He is not a saint, but neither is he a devil. Romero "does not moan on the grave of the bourgeois subject, but he doesn't replace it with cartoon super-heroes either" (Maurizi, 2004, Decomposing the Subject section, para. 2). Ben's murder is accidental, tragic and without purpose. It is not a heroic act in defense of civilization. At best, it is an act of incompetence; at worst, an act of patriarchal racist violence.

Night was not the first film to positively depict a black protagonist fighting for survival in a sea of white stupidity and violence. *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) features Sidney Poitier playing the brave police officer Virgil Tibbs, who is incorrectly suspected of murder in the Southern town of Sparta, Mississippi. In the most famous scene of the film, the murder suspect and cotton plantation owner, Endicott, slaps Virgil, who returns an even more forceful slap to the bigoted white man. Tibbs's strike to Endicott was a

shocking moment for white and black audiences, what Robert Abele (2011) calls “the slap heard round the world.” In *Night*, Ben makes unsupervised physical contact with an unconscious white woman (Barbra), strikes that same woman (after she hits him), repeatedly bludgeons a zombified white man in the head, shoots and kills a living white man (Mr. Cooper), and then re-kills a zombified version of that same white man. And while the narrative tension of *In the Heat of the Night* explicitly revolves around the color of Tibbs, no one in *Night of the Living Dead* comments once upon Ben’s race, which is truly remarkable within the racially-charged environment of the late 1960s (Kuhns, 2013). By ignoring the color of Ben’s skin (at least on the surface), the film opens a space in which race does not determine the nature of social interaction within a society of racist determination.

At the same time, the historical context of the film suggests a more political reading of Ben’s color. Given the intensity of racial conflict at time – the civil rights protests; the rise of the Black Panthers and Young Lords; the race riots of 1967; the assassination of King and the subsequent race riots of 1968 – it is nearly impossible not to see political significance in the concluding scene, when Ben is shot in the head and then dragged via meat hook onto a pile of bodies to be burned by the white posse.

According to Shaviro, Sheriff McClelland’s posse is “implicitly racist” (p. 91), a sentiment often shared by audiences and commentators. Newitz (2006) sees a historical parallel between the posse of *Night* and the KKK of *Birth*:

Like the KKK in *Birth*, the militia in *Night* comprise ordinary white citizens who use privately owned firearms to protect their land and, implicitly, their country.

As they fan out across the region, shooting and burning zombies, we begin to see the militia and zombies as caricatures of each other. (p. 110)

In this reading, Ben – an intelligent, independent black man who takes decisive action in order to survive – is a monstrous threat to white power and therefore must be destroyed. And the white posse is a zombie-like entity – a violent, mindless mass – that reinstates white patriarchal authority by killing the only (black) individual who offers us hope for the future of humanity.

Youthful audiences identified Ben as an anti-establishment hero, and would often cheer him on as he engaged in such acts as striking Mr. Cooper (Hervey, 2008).

Although the “youth revolution” was confused and hedonistic, it also advanced notions of freedom, equality and experimentation that challenged the racism, rigidity and violence of white patriarchal authority. Ben offered a point of identification for those who had dreamed of a new world. But Romero refuses to indulge in escapist fantasies, and insists upon tearing through ideological illusions in order to shine a black light upon historical realities. He is thus forced to kill his hero by the reality of revolutionary failure and the fact of societal dissolution.

While the social reality of 1968 America certainly demands a reading that is sensitive to Ben’s race, one should also note that Romero’s casting choices were made from necessity, without concern for ideological implications. Romero selected Duane Jones for the role because he was the best actor available, not because he was black (Gagne, 1987). The fact that Ben is black, and every other character in the film is white, makes for a potent political statement about the vicious nature of white power in 1960s America, but this was the result of choices made from practical necessity, not ideology.

(Though the fact that Romero chooses black men to play heroic figures in *Dawn, Day,* and *Land* does suggest ideological motivation.) And yet this does not invalidate the political significance of the racial dimension of this film. The conscious awareness and explicit intentions of the author are not the only factors at work in the creation of a resonant and meaningful political text.

Night was not merely a critique of subjective dysfunction, and a revelation of societal self-destruction; it was also a call to awaken and change. Its monstrous critique aimed at a political purpose, even if this purpose was not always explicit in the filmic text. “For Romero, the only way to restore meaning to life was with the active threat of Armageddon” (Maddrey, 2004, p. 124). Similarly, Hobbes presented his wolfish natural state to persuade his fellow countrymen of the need for a specific configuration of sovereignty. Plato and Tocqueville also turned to horrific scenarios in order to warn their audiences of a drastic need for individual and collective transformation.

The Universal Monster

As I discuss in chapter 7, Romero presents individuals in positions of institutional authority as the villains of his films, and the American power structure itself is ultimately depicted as the truly villainous entity or cannibal machine. At the same time, Romero insists that we are all monsters. We all participate in mindless predation to at least some extent. And we are all responsible for finding a new path forward. This is a central revelation of the best works in the subgenre that he has inspired.

If Hitchcock challenges the distinction between monstrous other and normal self in *Psycho*, Romero demolishes it in *Night*. Although Norman Bates is an American citizen, he is not average. He is an isolated individual who lives in an old gothic mansion

that is set back from the highway. Romero suffuses the world of the viewer with a terrifyingly ordinary mass monstrosity, building upon and intensifying previous efforts in *Invasion* and *Psycho*. In *Night*, monstrosity is no longer disavowed or distanced from the average subject in any way. Romero collapses the distinction between human and monster, civil and uncivil. In his zombie films, normality is monstrous, and monstrosity is normal; the same individuals simultaneously embody both categories. He depicts predatory brutality within living characters, and monsters that are human.⁹⁰ In the zombie apocalypse, we witness the implosion of a self-destructive normality.

The Romero zombie is the most ordinary of monsters. You need not take a road trip to encounter zombies; they will colonize whatever space you find yourself in. They appear within the everyday world of the viewer, and as a product of that world. The zombie is not an abnormal singularity, but the body of one's sister, friend, lover, or next-door neighbor. Indeed, zombie films since *Night* often show the friends and relatives of main characters transmogrifying into cannibal corpses. Individuals must exterminate, not an abnormal individual or completely non-human beast, but the bodies of loved ones who have just died. In this respect, the zombie apocalypse ruthlessly disregards the sentimental attachments of characters and audiences.

The monstrous body is often the abnormal body, the othered body. Romero does not limit monstrosity and horror to particular individuals or groups. As Patterson notes, “zombies seem the least gender-specific creature of all horror film monsters” (2008, p.

⁹⁰ The zombie is technically not human. It is a reanimated human corpse. Indeed, it would not be able to function as a monster unless it was different from the human in certain respects. As Cohen (1996) notes, the monster is “difference made flesh, come to dwell among us” (p. 7). However, the body the zombie inhabits is human. The zombie is the most uncanny of the monsters. As “the monster that is both extremely familiar in its human-like appearance yet extremely unfamiliar in every other way...the zombie represents an ideal configuration of Freud’s configuration,” notes Bishop (2010, p. 111).

108). In fact, zombieism appears to be the most inclusive form of monstrosity in history. The most welcoming of monsters, zombies do not exclude any nationality, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, class, or social group. Zombies embody any and all demographic particularities. Generally speaking, we are all equally monstrous in Romero's world. The zombie is the appearance of monstrosity in its most inclusive and universal form. It is the universal monster, or the universalization of monstrosity.⁹¹

The zombie is potentially anyone, and eventually everyone (provided they are not completely consumed before reanimation occurs), for in Romero's world everyone who dies becomes a zombie. Unless the zombie condition is cured or disappears, no one will escape this monstrous fate. In AMC's *The Walking Dead*, the characters learn at the end of the second season that everyone is infected with the cause of zombieism.⁹² Everyone will turn into a "walker." In Romero's *Land of the Dead*, the heroic character Riley includes everyone – the living and the dead – in the category of living death. Zombieism thus represents a form of global inversion or universal category crises in which the living are dead, and the dead are living.

In *Night* and his subsequent zombie films, Romero depicts Middle America as a monstrous mass. As Mohammad (2010) notes, individual zombies are parts of a "total zombie organism" (p. 97), while characters in the *Walking Dead* refer to roaming groups of zombies as "herds." Traditional narratives often depict a mass of humans surrounding a singular monster. In *I Am Legend*, Matheson inverts this relationship, depicting a single

⁹¹ As the universal monster, it is also the democratic monster, or the monster of democracy. Modern democracy advances the universal – what is most common amongst individuals – in opposition to aristocracy, which upholds the particular (Manent, 1996).

⁹² As Maurizi (2004) points out, in Romero's films zombieism is technically not a contagion, for death is the cause of people becoming zombies. However, once the zombie apocalypse commences, it nonetheless unfolds in a viral manner, even if it is not caused by a biological agent.

human surrounded by a mass of monsters. This inverted quantitative relationship between human and monster is also present in *Invasion*, *The Birds*, and *Night* (Bishop, 2011, p. 104). In the zombie apocalypse, the monstrous exception quickly becomes the norm, and the human norm becomes a temporary exception that will soon be eradicated, as zombies take over the world.

According to Marco Maurizi (2004), *Night* is the first instance in American cinematic history in which the people are the star of a film. In contrast to Hollywood's fixation upon idealized superstars (artificial ideological constructs), Romero places the decaying mass on center stage in the position of a terribly unattractive collective protagonist. Romero's zombies represent the emergence of the people as main character not only in the sense that they look like ordinary individuals, but also in that they literally are the people. In his zombie hordes, we see citizens – not professional actors (with a few exceptions, as noted above) – demonstrating their own monstrosity before the camera. Romero's zombies are the monsters of the people, performed by the people, for the people to consume. Monstrosity first appeared within U.S. cinema – in the gothic figures of Dracula, Frankenstein, Mr. Hyde, the Mummy, the Werewolf, etc. – in the form of a singular, foreign threat. It is now everyone, everywhere in the form of the Romero zombie.

Conclusion

In *Night of the Living Dead*, Romero revolutionized the horror genre and created the cannibal zombie. He utilized the destruction and chaos of the zombie apocalypse scenario in order to critique dominant institutions and values, and to reveal the monstrosity of the American self. Instead of depicting social authorities vanquishing a

foreign or abnormal other, he featured normal American citizens as monsters driven by destructive appetite. Made at a liminal moment in U.S. history, his film reflected civic unrest, category crisis, and great uncertainty. He hit upon several contemporary anxieties that were circulating within 1960s American society, including concerns over the dissolution of the nuclear family, racial tensions, and the war in Vietnam. Within the context of my canonical narrative of monstrous subjectivity, Romero envisioned the breakdown of 1950s automaton conformity, and the re-animation of deadened American subjects. That is, he depicted the return of the repressed within the context of the 1960s counterculture.

Chapter 7—Civilization of the Living Dead: The Zombie Apocalypse Narrative

Man seeks for drama and excitement; when he cannot get satisfaction on a higher level, he creates for himself the drama of destruction.

-Eric Fromm

Introduction

Following the successful release of the zombie films *28 Days Later* and *Resident Evil* in 2002, the Romero zombie and its apocalyptic narrative began to proliferate throughout American popular culture, from books and video games to scientific studies and philosophical discussions. Ending a 20-year absence from the subgenre, Romero returned to his creation with gusto in 2005 with *Land of the Dead*. This chapter examines the meaning and evolution of the zombie figure – from its original incarnation as the slave of a voodoo master in *White Zombie* (1932), to Romero’s depiction of zombie revolutionaries in *Land of the Dead* (2005) – within the context of canonical monstrosity. I argue that the evolution of the subgenre – and of Romero’s films in particular – reflects the stages of societal and characterological degeneration outlined in Plato’s narrative, within the context of contemporary America.

The automatons of 1950s films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) resemble Plato’s money-loving oligarch, Hobbes’s man-machine, and Tocqueville’s money-loving democrat. In *Night*, Romero depicts the repressed vital energies of the beast disintegrating the enforced unity of the automaton mass. Whereas *Night*’s zombies enact a collective “return of the repressed” that chaotically ruptures the patriarchal norms of American society, the shopping malls zombies of *Dawn* instead embody an excessive presence of animal appetite and material consumption. The zombies of *Dawn* correspond

to Plato's representation of the pleasure-seeking mass. *Day of the Dead* (1985) brings the viewer into the dark and twisted corridors of an underground bunker, and shows zombies being experimented upon by scientists and treated sadistically by soldiers. This remnant of humanity is lorded over by the irascible tyrant figure Captain Rhodes. Romero's *Night*, *Dawn*, and *Day* thus correspond, respectively, to the drone, the mass, and the tyrant in Plato's theory of societal degeneration.

The zombies of *28 Days Later* (2002) and the *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) remake are enraged killing machines, driven not by hunger for material pleasure but by the passion to destroy living humans. Motivated purely by bloodlust, these running zombies differ from the slaves of *White Zombie* (1932), the automaton conformists in *Invasion* (1956), the reanimated automatons of *Night* (1968), and the shopping mall zombies of *Dawn* (1978). Whereas *Day* (1985) examined the tyrannical nature of American society – specifically of the scientific-military establishment – it did not feature masses of running zombies possessed solely by the desire to hurt and kill humans. The appearance of the sadistic zombie mass in *28 Days Later* and the *Dawn* remake suggests that American society descended into the depths of the tyrannical mind-set immediately following 9/11.

Alongside these darker visions of tyrannical excess, Romero depicts zombie revolutionaries in *Land of the Dead* (2005). Romero becomes increasingly sympathetic to the zombie over the course of his *Dead* series. Whereas zombies in *Night* are terrifying cannibal corpses, those in *Dawn* are shown in a more nuanced light, as dangerous consumers of human flesh, but also as clowns and even pathetic, lost souls. In *Day*, he begins to more closely examine the physiology and science of the zombie. *Day*

presents the first zombie character “Bub,” who is able to relearn basic skills from his life. In *Land*, Romero depicts zombies as revolutionary protagonists who, in response to being preyed upon by sadistic humans, awaken from their solipsistic imprisonment within the flesh, and begin to organize themselves. The zombies in this film are able to channel the beast into strategic political action. Reversing the dynamic within Marx’s factory, Romero shows the cannibalized slaves of American society eating their wealthy oppressors. In this way, Romero brings a hopeful closure to the degeneration narrative that Plato long ago established.

Like Plato and Hobbes, Romero modifies the subject positions of the horror genre in his zombie films. He includes everyone – zombies and living characters – within the category of monstrosity. Similar to Plato’s cave and Hobbes’s state of nature, Romero’s zombie apocalypse is a situation in which humans are simultaneously predatory monsters and pitiful victims.

However, the real threat to the living humans in Romero’s films tends to come not from zombies, but from those still-living individuals who cannot transcend their pettiness, greed and lust for power. Those who are power-hungry, sadistic and/or demented – including Captain Rhodes in *Day*, and Kaufman in *Land* – are the villains of his films. Ultimately, the American power structure itself – the dominant institutions and norms that the villainous humans personify – is portrayed as the true monster with which we must collectively contend.

The central function of the heroic figures in the *Dead* series is not to hunt and expel the monsters from their midst in order to save civilization, but to uncover and transcend human monstrosity. Romero’s heroic figures consciously acknowledge the

intimate connection between zombies and humans. They strive to overcome the monstrous aspects of self and society, be of service to others, and work towards some form of cooperative sociality and democratic decision-making.

In his attempt to transcend appetitive tyranny and eliminate the violence of prejudice, Romero breaks up traditional representations of the subject positions in respect to race and gender. His films often feature a white woman and a black man working cooperatively in order to manifest a peaceful, interracial future, thus reversing traditional representations of black monstrosity and female victimhood.

The Zombie Renaissance

Americans find themselves in a particularly monstrous moment. The zombie – a dead and decaying human body that has been reanimated into a state of mindless cannibalism – is at the center of this monstrous maelstrom. As McIntosh explains, zombies

have appeared in the steamy jungles of Haiti, on the dry plains of Transvaal, in Welsh tin mines, underwater, and in space. They have shuffled onto the silver screen, the Broadway stage, video games, and annually the streets of Manhattan, San Francisco, and Minneapolis...Zombies, it seems, are everywhere. (p.1)

Masses of the living dead have spread virally within a variety of mediums and forms: video games, television programs, commercials, and Do-It-Yourself movies; comic books, survival manuals, and literature; music and theatre; toys and games; food and fitness routines; political rhetoric, scientific studies, academic publications and government programs. This phenomenon has been dubbed the “zombie renaissance” (Bishop, 2010, p.16).

The recent success of the zombie is particularly striking in light of its historical lack of prominence. The zombie has been a part of American popular culture since 1929, the year William Seabrook published his travelogue *The Magic Island*, a work that brought sensational stories of Voodoo rituals and culture to American audiences. Seabrook recounted his discussions with natives about zombies, and described his personal observations of zombies being used as slave labor in the agricultural fields of Haiti. He depicted the latter as automatons with glazed eyes that lacked an independent will and that were completely controlled by their master.

The zombie first appears on the silver screen in 1932 in *White Zombie*, immediately following the play *Zombie* (1932), both of which were indebted to Seabrook's travelogue. Made with rented sets and props from previous films, *White Zombie* was not as critically acclaimed as contemporaneous horror films like *Frankenstein* (1931), but it was successful enough with audiences to spawn the first wave of zombie films. For the next two decades, the zombie functioned as the mind-controlled slave laborer or servant of evil Voodoo masters or mad scientists in B horror movies set in exotic Caribbean locales. Preoccupied with the economic, racial and sexual dimensions of possession, the zombies in these films often represented white colonialist fears of revolt by black natives (Bishop, 2010).

The zombie as we know it – your dead next-door neighbor with an awkward gait, who likes to feast on human flesh and travel in mass formation – appears on screen in 1968 in *Night of the Living Dead*. In *Night*, Romero re-invents the zombie as the cannibal corpse of an American citizen, driven by instinct to kill and consume living humans. Since *Night*, the zombie has been the creature and agent of the apocalypse, its

appearance indicating the rapid and total breakdown of societal norms and infrastructures (Pagano, 2008). Every zombie on the American cultural landscape – from critically-acclaimed movies like Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* (2002) to academic publications like *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* – are indebted to the zombie films of George A. Romero, especially *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). These films established the zombie apocalypse narrative that has captured the enthusiastic attention of audiences around the world.

Prior to *Night*, the zombie was confined to the status of second-class monstrosity. Lacking the poignant expression of alienation voiced by Frankenstein’s monster, and without Dracula’s alluring aura of romantic sophistication and de-sublimated Victorian sexuality, the zombie is a species of monster that, for the first half of its existence (1932 – 1968), stood in mute silence in the shadows of the more popular members of the living dead genus. Artists, audiences, and scholars have always embraced figures like Frankenstein’s monster and Dracula, but not so the zombie.

The recent surge in popularity of the zombie is a post-September 11th phenomenon (Bishop, 2010, p. 26). The fate of the zombie changed dramatically in 2002 with the popular and lucrative films *28 Days Later* and *Resident Evil*, the latter taking its name and basic premise from a popular video game franchise. Discussing the former Bishop writes, “by returning to the classical form of Romero’s films, British director Danny Boyle officially kicked off the ‘zombie renaissance’ with the first truly frightening zombie movie in years” (2010, p. 16).

Zombies have since left few, if any, forms of culture untouched, appearing in comics like *Dead World* and *Dead Eye Open*; video game franchises like *Left4Dead* and

Dead Rising; and literature like the *The Zombie Survival Guide* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Fans of the undead have begun hard-rock bands such as the Zombeatles and have literally taken to the streets around the world, wearing costume and makeup, during “zombie walks.” The first zombie television series – AMC’s *The Walking Dead* – is one of the more recent and widely recognized instances of the zombie’s cultural conquest.

Terms like “zombie categories,” “zombie bank,” “zombie politics,” “zombie state” and “philosophical zombie” have appeared within popular and academic discourse. Meanwhile, the American government has entered the fray. The Center for Disease Control has utilized the zombie apocalypse scenario in order to draw attention to its disaster preparedness program, while the Pentagon has developed a plan to counter the walking dead (Lubold, 2014). The Zombie Research Society (ZRS) “was founded in 2007 as an organization dedicated to the historic, cultural and scientific study of the living dead.” According to its website, the ZRS has “hundreds of thousands of active members across the world” (www.zombieresearchsociety.com). In 2012, academics from around the world gathered in Montreal for “Invasion Montreal: First International Conference on Zombies” to consider the many forms of zombie culture from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

According to McIntosh, the zombie has surpassed the Gothic monsters within American popular culture and discourse (p. viii). “Few monster types,” he writes, “have embedded themselves in the popular imagination as thoroughly as zombies have” (p. 1). Similarly, David Flint claims, “the zombie has increasingly dominated the horror genre, becoming its preeminent archetype” (p. 8). Indeed, Americans are consuming and

reflecting upon spectacular, grotesque images and imagined scenarios of cannibal consumption and societal implosion, of a human-eat-human world awash in blood and guts, at a rate that is historically unprecedented.⁹³ No other monster – even the wildly popular vampire – has appeared so widely or resonated so deeply within American popular culture. The zombie has moved from being a neglected B-movie monster standing in the shadows of its more celebrated peers like Frankenstein and Dracula, to being a global monstrous sensation. Humans have fallen in love with the image of themselves as dumb, insatiable, rotting corpses lacking in any self-control, sophistication or supernatural powers. What lies beneath the gore-soaked surface of a zombified American popular culture?

During the zombie renaissance, intellectuals from several disciplines have studied the figure. There are now examinations of the history and evolution of the cinematic zombie, from its Haitian origins to contemporary Hollywood cinema (Bishop, 2010; Dendle, 2001; Flint, 2009; Kay, 2008; Russell, 2008); studies of various aspects of zombie culture, including video games, music, and literature (Greene and Mohammad, 2010; McIntosh and Leverette, 2008); close readings of the films of George A. Romero (Bishop, 2010; Gagne, 1987; Hervey, 2008; Kane, 2010; Maurizi, 2004; Paffenroth, 2006); and scientific discussions of the zombie (Cummings, 2011; Schlozman, 2012).

Scholars in the burgeoning field of “zombie studies” often utilize a specific theoretical lens or tradition in order to read an aspect or instance of zombie culture. One can now find examinations of the zombie from a variety of approaches, including

⁹³ The historically unprecedented nature of the zombie during the zombie renaissance is demonstrated by both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the phenomenon. Quantitatively, there are simply many more zombies than there ever were before. In qualitative terms, the zombie is appearing within many more cultural and discursive forms than any other monster ever has before.

psychoanalysis (Bishop, 2010; Clark, 2010; Wood, 1986/2003), Marxism (Bishop, 2010; Lutz, 2010; Maurizi, 2004), feminism (Keith, 1992; Patterson, 2008), deconstructionism (Leverette, 2008), affect theory (MacCormack, 2008), postmodernism (Shaviro, 1993), queer theory (Leverette, 2008), the philosophy of mind (De Quincey, 2009; Hauser, 2010; Malik, 2002), the study of religion (Paffenroth, 2006; Moreman, 2010), folklore studies (Koven, 2008), Gothic studies (Bishop, 2010; Waller, 1986/2010), and film studies (Dendle, 2001; Dillard, 1973/1987; Flint, 2009; Gagne, 1987; Harvey, 2008; Kane, 2010; Kay, 2008; Maddrey, 2004; Phillips, 2005; Russell, 2005/2008; Vuckovic, 2011).

The zombie has been popular with doctors and scientists, inspiring works like Harvard Psychiatrist Steven Schlozman's *The Zombie Autopsies* and Dr. Peter Cummings' *The Neuropathology of Zombies*, which apply or develop scientific theories to account for the zombie phenomenon. Schlozman and Cummings, along with Romero himself, sit on the advisory board of the Zombie Research Society. Academics within the social sciences and humanities have also sensed the significance of the living dead, producing books like *Zombie Capitalism* (2009), *Zombie Economics* (2010), *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* (2011), and *Zombie Politics and Culture* (2011), as well as compilations of short essays that examine the philosophical and sociological dimensions of the zombie like *Zombie Culture* (2008), *Zombies, Vampires, and Philosophy* (2010), *Zombies are us* (2011), and *Generation Zombie* (2011).

The zombie has been at the center of a debate about the nature of human consciousness within the philosophical literature, as discussed by Kenan Malik in *Man, Beast and Zombie* (2002) and Christian De Quincey in *Consciousness from Zombies to*

Zngels (2009). This literature defines the “philosophical zombie” as a being that looks and functions like a human on the outside but that lacks human interiority or subjectivity. It resembles the robotic *Stepford Wives* and the pod people of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which differ from the cannibal corpses of *Night* (Hauser, 2010, p. 54). The philosophical zombie thus manifests an uncanny conflation of the human and the robot, and is similar in this respect to canonical figures like Tocqueville’s prisoner and Hobbes’s man-machine, as well as the original Voodoo zombie, which is essentially an enslaved automaton (Dendle, 2001). Philosophers have situated the philosophical zombie within the familiar terrain of Cartesian mind-body dualism. Some have argued that the philosophical zombie proves that human consciousness cannot be reduced to a materialistic epiphenomenon, that human subjectivity participates in something that is substantially different from the physical substance of the body. Conversely, others have argued that the sympathetic treatment of zombies in Romero’s films “reanimates the view that persons are most fundamentally corporeal objects” (Larkin, 2010).

Social scientists have also analyzed the zombie. Seeing a parallel between the insatiable bloodlust of the zombie, and the predatory policies of Wall Street banks, financial analysts began, in 2009, using the term “zombie bank” to describe the largest American financial houses like J.P. Morgan Chase and Citibank. According to David Sirota (2010), these “reanimated” institutions are “cannibalizing the economy,” while “zombie executives” run Wall Street according to outmoded “zombie ideologies.” In the time of “zombie capitalism” and “zombie economics,” it appears that Wall Street is at the forefront of a more abstract or financialized version of the cannibalistic exploitation that Marx long ago warned of within the factory.

According to Henry Giroux (2010), America is dominated by a “zombie politics” that valorizes a mindless and insensitive hyper-individualism and lust for profit, and that violently rejects the public sphere and any notions of care for the less privileged members of society. In *Zombie Politics and Culture* (2011), Giroux extends his argument to various neoliberal phenomena, including right-wing hate speech and sadistic educational policies that punish and criminalize youth of color.

Within the discipline of political science, Daniel Drezner (2011) has published *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*, a work that imagines how competing theories of international relations – realism, liberalism, social constructivism, etc. – would view and respond to a zombie outbreak. Viewing the zombie apocalypse like a natural disaster, Drezner’s approach to the zombie is similar to other scientific studies and novels. Instead of looking for epistemological significance in its symbolic and narrative dimensions, he takes the monster literally, as something that might actually appear in the real world.

The zombie studies literature has brought to light aspects of the historical, cultural, philosophical and scientific dimensions of the zombie. Mathematicians have modeled a hypothetical zombie outbreak. Scientists have developed theories of the brain structure and physiology of the zombie. Doctors have looked for the cause of the zombie contagion. And scholars in the social sciences and humanities have analyzed its meaning and significance. I contribute to the zombie literature by situating Romero’s zombies and their apocalyptic narrative within the context of canonical monstrosity.

From Automaton Slave to Cannibal Consumer to Killing Machine

Like many monsters, zombies are fusion figures or hybrids, beings that assemble disparate or contradictory parts or qualities within one body. Since they first appeared on screen in *White Zombie*, zombies have been referred to as the “walking dead” or the “living dead.” As McIntosh notes, the zombie is “a contranymic creature, meaning that the two definitions of *zombie* are actually their own opposites” (2008, p. viii). Both living and dead, the zombie is an ontological impossibility within the accepted Western scientific paradigm. Shaviro similarly argues, “zombies always come in between: they insinuate themselves with the uncanny, interstitial space that separates (but thereby also connects) inside and outside, the private and the public, life and death. In this liminal position,” he continues, “they are obscene objects of voyeuristic fascination” (1993, p. 104). The zombie thus poses to us the riddle of living death. We must fathom the significance of a contradictory fusion, in the American subject, of being “alive” and yet “dead” at the same time. As a corpse that moves, the zombie does not fit clearly within either of these foundational categories, but violates and fuses the two in a horrendous fashion.

As we approach the zombie we should first note that it is the only truly American monster. Of the popular humanoid monsters within popular culture, like the vampire and the werewolf, the zombie is the only one that originated in the New World. It did not develop in European Gothic literature before entering American horror films. Instead, the zombie passed directly from Haitian folklore to Hollywood cinema (Bishop, 2010). What does this figure reveal about American subjectivity?

Several zombie scholars have traced the history of the zombie from Haitian folklore to contemporary popular culture, noting that *Night* significantly alters the original zombie, and that recent films like *28 Days Later* have produced further changes in this figure. However, scholars have not recognized or accounted for why the zombie has evolved from an automaton slave to a cannibal consumer to a killing machine. These three categories, and their sequential appearance, are explicable in terms of Plato's degeneration narrative.

The mind-controlled zombie is a disciplined and productive body. As such, it reflects the horrors of worker alienation. "It is significant that these voodoo-charmed slaves first struck the popular imagination of western capitalist society at the dawn of industrial automatization: they are the perfect metaphor for an utterly alienated modern workforce (Mohammad, 2010, p. 93). Indeed, the master-slave dynamic in the earlier zombie films reflects the experience of the worker in the industrial factory. Marx (1967/1992) personifies capital as a monstrous cannibal machine that controls and feeds upon its automaton slaves. The zombie, like the alienated worker, is a derivative creature, the plaything of capital, which is more intelligent and powerful than the alienated worker it sets into motion.

As Bishop (2010) points out, workers on the assembly line during the Great Depression would likely notice an uncanny similarity between the situation of the zombie slave laborers in *White Zombie* – who silently power the machinery in a Haitian sugar mill – and their own working conditions. As discussed in chapter 5, Tocqueville notes how Americans – in the penitentiary, but also in society more generally – operate like a mechanical methodical mass. They constitute a tyrannized mass of generic, productive

workers. Their souls have been enslaved by the “intellectualized violence” of majority tyranny. Of course, whereas the zombie slave laborers of *White Zombie* are literally connected to the industrial machinery of a factory, the living dead Americans in Tocqueville’s account discipline themselves into slavish, hardworking bodies. Yet the difference between the two is not so great. In both cases, an external master (the voodoo master and the majority, respectively) controls their souls through invisible commands, transforming them into a hard-working mass of unquestioning automaton bodies.

The original zombie films – and automaton narratives more generally – often portray subjects that are controlled and dominated by a master. They are examinations of the psychological and social bonds that perpetuate master-slave relations. Whereas the original zombie is a passive, controlled, productive mechanism, the Romero zombie is full of uncontrollable energy. It is not defined by rational production, but by irrational and destructive consumption. In this figure the beast has reclaimed possession of the body from machine civilization. The deadened automaton has returned to life.

Night enacts the violent emergence of the beast within the human self that Hobbes made such great efforts to mechanically contain. It thus stands to reason that his state of nature resembles Romero’s zombie apocalypse. Both Hobbes and Romero depict humanity dissolving into isolated, a-social cannibals in the absence of government. Both show fearful individuals who band together in an attempt to survive their nightmarish ordeal, but who ultimately live a short and miserable life.

Whereas Hobbes sought to contain the beast within the man-machine, Tocqueville witnessed the psychic slavery and instability created by this repressive containment. He saw that the Americans were not satisfied by their methodical, mechanistic approach to

life, and noted the presence of an unruly appetite for material goods. *Dawn* depicts gluttonous Americans who have fully realized the “taste for material gratifications” described by Tocqueville. The zombie mass in this film also resonates with Plato’s “large and powerful animal” ruled by appetite and illusion (1955/1987, trans., 493a-b). Just as Plato’s democratic mass is stirred into action by its desire for “honey,” so is the zombie mass of *Dawn* brought to the mall by its hunger for the vast array of sweets and goods contained inside.

In *Dawn*, Romero’s zombies return in greater numbers and with much more force than they possessed in *Night*. They invade Philadelphia, shutting down the normal structures and functions of society. A group of survivors travels to a shopping mall, slaughters the zombies within, and makes camp, but the mall is quickly surrounded by masses of the living dead. After the initial excitement of limitless consumption fades into boredom and alienation for the four main characters, the zombies retake the mall and claim the bodies of two of the main characters, Roger and Stephen. Roger becomes enamored with a macho adventurism, taking careless risks that result in him becoming bit by zombies; and Stephen, out of a greedy possessiveness, shoots at members of a biker gang who want to share the mall’s commodities, thereby precipitating a shoot-out, as zombies flood into the mall. Both Stephen and Roger, who give into dysfunctional manifestations of appetite, turn into zombies.

According to Plato, the decay of society reaches an advanced state in democracy, as society moves along the path to tyranny. At the end of *Night*, representatives of the patriarchal order are able to (at least temporarily) eliminate the zombie threat. In doing so, they kill the black hero, who represents the ideal of communitarian action (Murray,

2010), as well as the country's hope for a peaceful interracial future. In *Dawn* there is no hope for containment or return to normalcy. Zombies have completely overrun civilization. A scientist on television even suggests that nuclear bombs be dropped on the major metropolitan centers in order to eliminate the zombies (even though this would kill any survivors). Realizing that they have become trapped in their consumer paradise, the more self-reflexive Peter and Fran are able to escape from the mall, as the zombies reclaim it for themselves. In the final moments of the film, Peter casts down his gun and joins Fran in the helicopter as they fly away from the prison of materialism and consumerism.

Given the predominance of psychoanalytic theory within film studies, it is important to note that the zombies in this film are “overtly presented as simulacral doubles (equivalents rather than opposites) of living humans; their destructive consumption of flesh...immediately parallels the consumption of useless commodities by the American middle class” (Shaviro, 1993, p. 92). In *Dawn*, the human characters are no longer repressing their instinctual desires for pleasure through consumption. They have left behind the love of money and are freely indulging their insatiable taste for material gratifications. Instead of enacting a “return of the repressed,” they wallow in disgusting excess; the inner repressed opposite of the oligarchic character has become monstrously externalized in the democratic mass.

In *Day*, the spatial dynamics of monstrosity have been completely inverted. One of the remnants of humanity, a group of scientists and soldiers, has retreated into a dark subterranean military bunker, while zombies occupy the world above. *Day* thus inverts the normal human-monster spatial relations of the genre. According to Dr. Logan, whom

the soldiers call “Dr. Frankenstein,” the ratio of zombies to humans is roughly 400,000 to 1, which means that there are approximately 595 living humans in the world of *Day*.⁹⁴

Dr. Logan performs experiments upon the zombies that the soldiers capture. He attempts to domesticate them through reward and punishment, feeding human flesh to the zombie Bub as a reward for “good” behavior.⁹⁵ As Shaviro notes, “all that remains of postmodern society is the military-scientific complex, its chief mechanism for producing power and knowledge” (1993, p. 93). Indeed, we have arrived at the rotten, demented core of the giant man-machine’s malfunctioning brain.

The tyrannical Captain Rhodes, a member of the U.S. military, commands the operation. Him and his soldiers express racist and sexist views, harass Sarah and her former Latino boyfriend, and treat the zombies in a sadistic manner. Their behavior recalls a scene from the beginning of *Dawn*, when the character Wooley shouts hateful racial slurs as he shoots Puerto Rican inhabitants of a Philadelphia tenement building that his SWAT team is invading. Another member of the SWAT team is forced to kill Wooley in order to stop his hateful rampage. Whereas the sadistic soldier appears briefly and is easily contained in *Dawn*, this character type will dominate the narrative of *Day* in the figure of Rhodes. As Plato argues, democracy loosens the self’s control of the evil impulses within. In democracy we can thus glimpse the tyrannical future, as the evil and lawless impulses of the tyrant begin to emerge from out of the confused mixture of unnecessary desires that define the democratic character. The pleasant indulgence of the mall becomes the sadistic experimentation and torture of the military-scientific prison.

⁹⁴ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the resident population of the United States at the time of the film’s release is 237,924,000.

⁹⁵ *Fido* (2006) will pick up on the theme of zombie domestication within a world that resembles 1950s America. In this film, the corporation Zomcom has invented a domestication collar that renders the zombie into a servant/butler for the family, or a sexual partner for the lonely bachelor.

Like the characters in *Night* (except Ben), and Stephen and Roger in *Dawn*, the majority of the characters in *Day* do not attempt to communicate or cooperate, but fight among each other until they either become zombies or are consumed by them. The film concludes with zombies invading the underground bunker, and devouring the soldiers therein. Sarah, the heroic protagonist, who has searched for a cure to the condition and advocated cooperation throughout the film, is able to escape to an island, along with John and one other sympathetic character.

At the beginning of *Day*, Romero establishes a dead and rotten landscape in Fort Meyers, Florida in a highly symbolic shot: two zombies stumble out of a now-defunct bank; a crocodile slithers down the steps before them, as money lies uselessly on the steps. In the zombie apocalypse, money no longer animates desire as it did within the oligarchic phase of society. Money motivates the automaton (i.e., Plato's money-loving oligarch; Hobbes's productive man-machine; and Tocqueville's democrat), but not the zombie.

The presence of the crocodile in this scene suggests that humans are now controlled by the primitive desires of the reptilian brain, instead of by the instrumental rationality of the man-machine. According to brain scientist Paul Maclean, the human brain is actually a composite of three different brains: the neocortical or human brain, which regulates reason, creativity and self-awareness; the limbic or mammalian brain, which regulates emotion, nurturance and sociality; and the brain stem or reptilian brain, which controls automatic physiological processes like breathing and basic survival functions, including the fight-or-flight response (Korten, 2006, p. 283).

Maclean's triune theory of the brain thus confirms Plato's triune theory of the soul. Both claim that the human literally is a three-part hybrid. Plato does not associate the appetitive faculty with a crocodile, but the crocodile is often represented in myth, as well as within certain subgenres of horror, as an embodiment of cold-blooded, beastly predation. Interestingly, Plato represents the faculty of spirit (the source of emotion) with the lion, which is a mammal. Plato links these faculties to specific character types. The philosopher manifests reason; which connects the human to the divine; the timarch embodies the lion, which gives force of personality and courage; the democrat and the tyrant identify with the beast. Whereas in democracy the beast is expressed in licentious liberty and hedonistic consumption, in tyranny it becomes invested in sadistic predation and demented self-destruction.

Romero's symbolic *mélange* thus indicates that individuals have bypassed the rationality and creativity of the human, and the nurturance and sociality of the mammal, in favor of the destructive impulses of the reptilian beast within. Rhodes maintains the appearance of the human, but he actually enacts a barbaric regression into our ancient cold-blooded past.

Zombies have become increasingly aggressive, and the subgenre more violent and gory, over the decades since *Night*. If the zombies of *Dawn* represent the excessive pleasure-seeking and consumption of the animalistic mass, then the running, bloodthirsty zombies of *28 Days Later* and the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) embody the passion for destruction of the tyrant wolf-man. In *28 Days Later*, the "infecteds" – they

are infected by the “Rage virus”⁹⁶ – seem to only be interested in killing living humans. Their rage “apparently has nothing to do with hunger or any other bodily desire beyond the will to inflict harm” (Mohammad, 2010, p. 99). Eventually, their bodies self-destruct due to the insatiable bloodlust that drives them tirelessly. This further degeneration in the zombie figure points to the presence of tyranny within American society in the early 2000s. Indeed, Romero specifically focuses our attention upon corporate-governmental tyranny in *Land of the Dead* (2005).

Flawed and Villainous Humans

Generally speaking, everyone in Romero’s narratives is implicated in the monstrosity of beastly appetite and solipsistic thinking. However, not everyone’s behavior is equally criticized. In Romero’s films, the real threat to human survival often comes not from the zombies, but more immediately from those still-living individuals who cannot transcend their pettiness, greed and lust for power. After all, the zombies are helpless slaves of appetite, whereas humans are capable of rising above their monstrous impulses, even if this takes great effort.

Romero judges the behavior of his characters through the fate they receive, a typical mechanism of moral evaluation within the horror genre. Those who indulge in greed, violence and other forms of self-centered egotism either become zombies (Stephen and Roger), or are consumed by them (Rhodes and Kaufman). Those who use their strength and intelligence in an effort to build community, like Sarah (*Day*) and Riley (*Land*), survive and are able to form bonds with others.

⁹⁶ Experimenting on chimpanzees, scientists are able to isolate the neurochemicals responsible for aggression and then to develop an inhibitor; however, the chemical inhibitor that they develop mutates, resulting in the opposite excess: subjects controlled by rage.

Romero features white men as stubborn and close-minded patriarchs (Mr. Cooper in *Night*; Patrick O’Flynn and Seamus Muldoon in *Survival*); greedy individualists (Stephen and the bikers in *Dawn*); soldiers that are sadistic racists and/or sexists (Wooley in *Dawn*; Steel in *Day*), or power-hungry leaders (Captain Rhodes in *Day*; Kaufman in *Land*). The latter are presented as particularly dangerous predators, and bring to mind Plato’s tyrant.

Romero critiques white male power in the farmhouse and fields of *Night* in 1968; in the tenement and mall of *Dawn* in 1978; in the military-scientific bunker of *Day* in 1985; and in the impoverished slums, electrified border fences, and business boardroom/political war room of *Land* in 2005. The remake of *Night* (1990) – written by Romero but directed by Tom Savini, Romero’s zombie effects expert – examines interpersonal gender dynamics, and embraces female empowerment in the updated character of Barbara. *Diary of the Dead* (2006) – which considers the ways in which digital media, and screens more generally, alienate people from each other – does not examine race and gender to the same extent that Romero’s other films do, but it does feature a group of sympathetic blacks (mostly men) that has taken control of a neighborhood after the traditional structures of (white) power collapse. The black group assists the film’s main characters (young white film students), giving the latter needed supplies. In contrast, white soldiers, at a latter point in the movie, strip the main characters of those goods.

Although throughout his career Romero has consistently critiqued white male power, the ultimate villain in his films is not any specific individual or group. Like Plato’s cave, Hobbes’s natural state and Tocqueville’s penitentiary, Romero’s zombie

apocalypse emphasizes the enslaving and deadening nature of prison-like institutions and norms. “*Night of the Living Dead* suggests that the whole of society is rotten to the core,” writes Russell (2005/2008, p. 69). The same is true of his other zombie films. In *Dawn*, many of the dominant values and institutions of the social order – the news media, consumerism, science, marriage – are critically scrutinized and found unworthy of life. According to Kim Newman, in *Day*, “American society is cast in the role usually given to an individually hatable character” (Newman, 1988, p. 209; as cited in Shaviro, 1993, p. 95). Indeed, American society – more specifically, the American power structure, which is often helmed by white men – is the true monster in Romero’s mythology.

Romero’s Heroes

For Plato, Socrates personifies the hero, a figure who has escaped from the cave and assumes the dangerous task of leading others into the divine light of truth and justice. For Hobbes, wolfish individuals in the state of nature exchange an individualistic form of rationality for a collective one, and thereby generate the giant automaton sovereign Leviathan. In this case, the heroic function entails the maintenance of strict boundaries between the beast and the human. Tocqueville looks to religion and searches for a democratic elite that might help counter the universal sameness, materialism, and withdrawal that he beholds in America. Although at times he suggests that religion may temper these trends, at the end of the day his vision of American society leaves little room for heroes.

The central function of the heroic figures in the *Dead* series is not to hunt and expel monsters in order to save civilization. As depicted in *Day*, American civilization has been reduced to a cruel, deluded, violent military-scientific apparatus that is beyond

repair. The zombie apocalypse calls for a type of heroism that differs considerably from the macho adventurism of Rambo-like action stars, who typically use extreme violence to defend the American power structure. Romero insists that we must critically examine the norms and institutions of society, instead of indulging in the tribal fantasy of identifying, chasing after and destroying Third World monsters.

Romero's heroic figures consciously acknowledge the intimate connection between the human (including themselves) and the zombie. As Barbara says of the zombies at the end of the remake of *Night of the Living Dead* (1990): "We're them and they're us." Similarly, in *Dawn*, Peter says of the shopping mall zombies, "they're us, that's all." In *Land of the Dead*, Riley – the most flawless, upright, and heroic of the characters within Romero's zombie films – includes both zombies and humans (including himself) within the category of living death. Riley's companion, Charlie, after observing zombies reenacting behavior patterns from their former lives as humans, states: "Look at them. It's like they're pretending to live." Riley replies: "Isn't that what we're doing, pretending to live?" Monstrosity is no longer disavowed or disowned as foreign or external to the average subject. The selfless hero identifies with the monster and realizes that it reflects the monstrous condition in which everyone is immersed.

Romero consistently depicts racism and sexism as dangerous expressions of appetitive tyranny. If we are to have a future at all, it must be one in which equality is firmly established. Indeed, Romero breaks up traditional representations of the subject positions in respect to race and gender. After *Night's* catatonic Barbra, he features several intelligent, strong and action-oriented white women (Francine in *Dawn*; Sarah in

Day; Barbara in the remake of *Night*; and Debra in *Diary*), as well as several black male hero figures (Ben in *Night*; Peter in *Dawn*; John in *Day*; and Big Daddy in *Land*).

In *Dawn*, Francine (Gaylen Ross) is at first excluded from group decision-making. In one scene, the men (Peter, Roger and Stephen) discuss the possibility of aborting her fetus as she sits despondently in the dark in another room. However, she quickly insists upon participating in decision-making, having a gun, and learning how to fly the helicopter so that she may escape on her own if the need arises. Stephen, Francine's partner, does not like her viewpoint, but Peter (the heroic black male) acknowledges the validity and rationality of her requests, thus initiating the first of the dynamic relationships between black men and white women in the *Dead* series.

Like the men, Francine is tempted by the illusory happiness of the mall's consumer paradise, but she most clearly realizes the trap into which they have fallen, and attempts several times to unsuccessfully warn the others (Paffenroth, 2006). She flies away with Peter into the dawn of an uncertain interracial future at the conclusion of the film, as the zombies retake the mall.

In *Day*, Sarah (Lori Cardille) is an intelligent, open-minded, brave and caring scientist who insists upon cooperation and quickly performs necessary actions as spontaneous challenges arise. She strikes up a warm and enriching friendship with John, a black helicopter pilot who maintains a calm and peaceful demeanor throughout the tense proceedings. Like Barbara in the remake of *Night*, Debra in *Diary*, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Slack in *Land*, Sarah's character is a strong woman who experiences traumatic events, displays her intelligence and strength, and survives.

Although Romero draws upon certain tropes from the mythos of American individualism – such as the central importance of the gun for self-defense – his films critique self-centered behaviors and endorse a communitarian perspective (Murray, 2010). Romero’s heroic characters oppose those individuals who think only of themselves. They insist upon cooperation and collective decision-making. In his discussion of the heroic white women and black men appearing in Romero’s first three zombie films, Shaviro writes, “all these characters are thoughtful, resourceful, and tenacious; they are not always right, but they continually debate possible courses of action, and learn from their mistakes. They seem to be groping toward a shared, democratic kind of decision making” (1993, p. 87).

Zombie Evolution and Revolution

Machiavelli argued that the prince must know how to make a nice use of the beast in order to survive. In Romero’s films, the human is ruled by the beast but does not know how to make a nice use of it. However, Romero is hopeful that our beastly appetites can be averted from preying upon each other and channeled into revolutionary action. Indeed, alongside the visions of sadistic killing machines that have appeared in recent years, he has given us images of zombie evolution and revolution.

Although the zombies in *Night* are ordinary humans, Romero does not humanize them as he does in subsequent films. The first zombie that we encounter in *Night* – the graveyard zombie (Bill Heinzman) – has a look of insanity and derangement. While *Night* trades upon the terror of the ordinary human monster, future zombie apocalypses begin to more sympathetically examine the psychological and behavioral connections between human and zombie.

In *Dawn*, Romero begins to show the subjective viewpoint of zombies. He also depicts zombies whose faces portray human emotions like melancholy. He thus initiates the exploration of what Bishop (2010) calls “zombie subjectivity.” In contrast to the standard approach of the genre – unsympathetic othering – Romero presents a variety of nuanced views of the zombie condition – horror, humor, empathy, hope. He finds horror and humor in the clownish shopping mall zombies of *Dawn*, takes pity upon those that are treated sadistically by soldiers in *Day*, and celebrates a successful zombie revolution in *Land*.

In *Day*, the zombies have become a tyrannized mass that is preyed upon by demented and sadistic humans. Soldiers capture them, cage them, and then hand them over to scientists for experimentation. In this respect, zombies reflect the subject’s experience – beginning in childhood – of being domesticated and regimented by the structures of knowledge and power of American society (Shaviro, 1993). In this film Romero presents his first zombie protagonist, Bub. Under the direction of Dr. Logan, Bub relearns basic tasks from his past life, like saluting, picking up the phone, shaving, and holding a gun. At the end of the film, Bub pursues Captain Rhodes through the halls of the subterranean bunker, firing at the fleeing soldier before hungry zombies tear Rhodes apart.

According to Shaviro, the zombies in *Day* “are the long-accumulated stock of energy and desire upon which our militarized and technocratic culture vampiristically feeds, which it compulsively manipulates and exploits, but cannot forever hope to control” (1993, p. 95). If Marx’s capital is a vampire that feeds upon its automaton slaves (the mind-controlled, laboring zombie), then Romero’s zombies in *Day* are

systemic blowback, a representation of subjects that can no longer be controlled by the scientific-military machine.

Socrates claimed that “the first thing our artists must do...and it’s not easy – is to wipe the slate of human society and human habits clean (501a). Romero has found a way to do just that. In his zombie apocalypse narratives, he exposes the flaws in dominant institutions, social relations, and character types, and then unleashes his zombies upon those dysfunctional aspects of the dead past. In this respect, his zombies function like white blood cells in the collective immune system, attacking diseased and pathogenic invaders (like Kaufman and Rhodes). They swiftly wipe the human slate clean, but not before we learn what behaviors and institutions brought us to into our nightmarish condition.

On the one hand, zombies are the product and reflection of unexamined dysfunction. They reveal the intellectual and appetitive tyranny of self and society. On the other hand, Romero utilizes his zombies as the ideological instrument of a radical politics, to destroy that which he believes is oppressive and unjust, so that a new and more just world may come into being. This latter function of the zombie is especially evident in *Land*.

Like *Day*, *Land* depicts a world that has been nearly completely taken over by zombies, while humans are confined to a fortified island. The island is under the control of a ruthless capitalist and politician named Kaufman (Dennis Hopper). Kaufman is the CEO of Fiddler’s Green, an exclusive residence and private shopping center for the wealthy, as well as the center of business and political operations for Kaufman. Inside Fiddler’s Green, the wealthy lead lives of pleasant consumption, oblivious to the horrific

conditions that are faced by the poor humans who live in a nearby shantytown. Kaufman profits from the poor members of the shantytown, and sends raiders to pillage for supplies on the mainland in Uniontown, which is inhabited by the zombies.

Russell sees in Kaufman an amalgamation of United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld Rumsfeld and president George W. Bush Jr. (2005/2008, p. 190), while Romero himself claims that this character is based upon Rumsfeld (Flint, 2009, p. 96). “Kaufman and his cronies are, it seems, the zombie apocalypse’s answer to Enron, a group of rapacious businessmen interested in fiddling as much green as they can” (Russell, p. 189). *Land* is thus “a veiled allegory on Bush Jr.’s America” (Russell, p. 267).

In *Land*, Romero further explores zombie subjectivity. “Certainly, the zombies in *Land of the Dead* are more central than in any other of Romero’s living dead outings,” notes David Russell (2005/2008, p. 189). Indeed, in this film the zombies have their own independent plot line and incipient personalities. In the opening scenes, zombies go about their daily tasks peacefully in Uniontown. A band of zombies clumsily tries to play their instruments in a park gazebo; two younger zombies walk slowly down the street, holding hands. As Charlie states, “its like they’re pretending to live.” This scene of domestic zombie tranquility is disturbed by the appearance of a monstrous presence: human raiders, employees of Kaufman, enter Uniontown to gather supplies, sadistically slaughtering zombies as they do so.

Under the leadership of Big Daddy, a black former gas-station attendant, the zombies begin to expand their awareness of themselves and each other. Recapitulating a primitive stage of human evolution, they learn to communicate through physical and

vocal gestures, and to use basic tools and weapons. The alert Big Daddy realizes that Fiddler's Green, the glittering skyscraper in the distance, is the source of their suffering. He encourages his fellow zombies to bring their beastly appetites under the control of the spark of reason that has flashed into their consciousness. The army that gathers around him includes several individuated zombie characters, performed with subtlety by professional actors, instead of anonymous zombie extras. They march towards Fiddler's Green, travelling under water to reach the island. After tearing down the electrified fences that surround the human settlement, they break into Fiddler's Green and eat the rich.

Big Daddy is arguably the most interesting character in Romero's zombie films. In this figure, Romero thoroughly conflates monster, victim and hero. Big Daddy is a monster that suffers at the hands of sadistic humans, takes decisive action, and triumphs against the forces of predation. David Russell discusses the historical and political aspects of this character in relation to previous heroic figures in the *Dead* series: "Romero styles this uprising in keeping with the rest of the series's racial undertones. Big Daddy is like a zombified Black Panther, a civil rights revolutionary who leads this living dead underclass on a riot against the Establishment" (2005/2008, p. 189).

Like the freed prisoner in Plato's allegory, Big Daddy, played with great skill by Eugene Clark, realizes that a world exists beyond his immediate sense perceptions. "As a zombie who's regained the power of thought and speech – albeit limited – he's jumped several steps up the evolutionary ladder" (Russell, 2005/2008, p. 189). He turns away from a life of appetite, and the world of pleasant appearances, encouraging the other zombies to do the same. Unlike many of the unsympathetic human characters in this

film, Big Daddy accesses the mammalian brain, experiencing anguish when he sees zombies senselessly destroyed by humans. Empathetically moved by the plight of his fellow zombies, he teaches them to avoid being hypnotized by the fireworks that the humans set off, and to set their sights on something greater than material pleasure. If audiences were able to cheer on Bub as he pursued Captain Rhodes in *Day*, they find a fully developed zombie character to identify with in Big Daddy. In fact, Big Daddy is something like a zombie version of Riley, the heroic human character. Both have set out upon the hero's journey of introspection and transformation. Both are ultimately looking for the same thing: a peaceful resolution to the war between self and other without, and a balanced synthesis of reason and appetite within.

Collective Cannibalism

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, cannibalism is an enduring theme in canonical representations of monstrosity, from Plato's wolf-man to Hobbes's Leviathan to Romero's zombie. What does the cannibalism of the zombie signify? How is it related to previous depictions of cannibalism within the canon?

Plato uses cannibalism as a metaphorical critique of intraspecies predation. His wolf-man is a singular figure that epitomizes cannibalism, but it is also the character type that everyone within tyranny will idealize (Lee, 1955/1987, p.356). Just as it would be a mistake to analyze Hitler's character in isolation from 1930s German subjectivity, it would also be a mistake to view the wolf-man in isolation from the citizens of a tyrannical society. As Reich (1946/1995) argues, "*'fascism' is the basic emotional attitude of man in authoritarian society, with its machine civilization and its mechanistic-mystical view of life*" (p. x.). Like Plato's tyranny "*fascism...is supported and*

championed by masses of people” (p. x). From this viewpoint, Hitler – a modern instance of the wolf-man tyrant – is an externalization of the horrific nature of every imperfect character type. Thus whereas the typical cannibal film uses cannibalism to depict the other as a threatening monster (Brown, 2012), Plato argues that it is the essence of human monstrosity in general.

Hobbes refers to the same ancient transformation myth as Plato. And Hobbes similarly uses cannibalism in order to signify the universally shared monstrous potential within us all. The imagery on the frontispiece of *De Cive* suggests “the general idea that, in the natural condition of man, the only law is to eat or be eaten” (Rossello, 2012, p. 266). Everyone in the state of nature is forced to become a cannibalistic predator, whether this is the result of the logic of the prisoner’s dilemma and/or the inherent wickedness of human nature. However, Hobbes also participates at times in the use of cannibalism to represent the other as a monstrous threat, as seen in his references to the American savages. Hobbes’s belief that everyone who exists outside of (his notion of) civil society will automatically become a cannibal may be the product, at least in part, of his desire for a world of rigid control, in which everything must be geometrically defined so as to avoid any disagreements or lapses in containment. Like the oligarchic character for whom he constructs a safe and secure civil society, Hobbes attempts to repress the beast, thus generating a dualistic self, a self that is split into opposite extremes. His notion of universal cannibalism in the state of nature may thus be, at least partially, the extreme manifestation of the man-machine’s repressed inner opposite (the beast).

For Marx, cannibalism is built into the production process of capitalism. While Marx’s materialist depiction of production implies a universal form of cannibalism –

workers invest their bodies and lives into commodities that are then consumed by everyone – he emphasizes the cannibalistic nature of the industrial factory. The factory is a space in which workers are consumed as raw materials. His use of the vampire metaphor is telling: capitalism literally sucks. Indeed, Marx addresses an elite form of cannibalism in which wealthy capitalists and their machines drain the life out of their wage-slave victims.

Plato also depicts a form of elite predation in his tyrant, but, at the same time, he indicates that cannibalism is a universal phenomenon, something that everyone participates in, at least under certain political conditions. Interestingly, Hobbes (unconsciously) advances a form of elite cannibalism – that of Leviathan – in order to counter the collective cannibalism of the state of nature.

In one of the great filmic critiques of capitalist class relations, Brian Yuzna's *Society* (1989) represents the rich as a group of incestuous cannibals who engage in secret orgies, their bodies blending together into a blob-like entity as they eat a young member of the poor who they have adopted and raised as their own. Cannibalism functions in this film – as it does in Marx's thought – as a critique of elite predation.

According to Wood (1986/2003), "cannibalism represents the ultimate in possessiveness, hence the logical end of human relations under capitalism" (pp. 82-83). In other words, the devouring logic of capital infects the members of society more generally. Capital replicates itself universally not only with respect to the circuit of investment (M-C-M'), but also in respect to the appetitive disposition it requires of its agents/owners, and that it encourages in its subjects more generally.

Wood specifically links the cannibalistic logic of capitalism to the appearance of cannibalism within American horror films in the 1970s, a phenomenon initiated by *Night* and continued in films like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. “The four most intense horror films of the 70s at exploitation level⁹⁷...are all centered on cannibalism, and on the specific notion of present and future (the younger generation) being devoured by the past” (pp. 82-83).

The idea of a younger generation being consumed by the older generation has been around at least since the Ancient Greek myth of Kronos (Cronus), who devours his children (except for Zeus). It is present in Marx’s notion of the past consuming the present. And we can see it in *Night*’s depiction of the old order preying upon its younger members, as well in the relationship between the cannibal family and the young travellers in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. However, the current proliferation of the zombie suggests that the destructive consumption that capitalism institutionalizes and universalizes has escalated to an alarming degree, such that the very existence of future generations is threatened.

As Ellen Dannin (2011) writes in “I, Consumer?”:

Today, our only relationship with other beings and other things is to consume them. From one end of the country to the other, we have all been harnessed together into a great devouring machine, consuming plants, animals, vistas, beauty and resources of every sort with no worries for the future.

Our monstrous consumption has reached a crisis point. We have entered *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism* (1999), a period of *Zombie Capitalism* (2009), *Zombie Economics*

⁹⁷ These are *Night of the Living Dead*, *Raw Meat*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

(2010), and *Zombie Politics and Culture* (2011). We have assembled our bodies into a great devouring machine that is rapidly destroying the planetary ecosystem, and thus threaten the future of our (and possibly all other) species. As reflected in zombie films like *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007), the self-destructive nature of capitalism – its imbalance between the dead and the living, the past and present – has gone viral. In this light, cannibalism in recent zombie narratives becomes a warning about the ecocidal potential of our uncontrolled consumption.

Zombies today reflect “the failure of our species to assimilate other bodies into ourselves in a mindfully ethical way” (Mohammad, 2010, p. 102). Our failure to intelligently regulate our appetites is generating “a violently swift and powerful explosion of nightmares” (p. 99). In their most potent and terrifying manifestation as deranged killing machines, zombies “are not just symbols of repressed desire or anxiety; they are the radically embodied, limit-breaking consequences of repression in its social totality, the inevitable eruption of crises on a global rather than a personal level” (p. 101), and thus “the monsters *par excellence* of late-capitalist culture” (p. 101). Monsters like King Kong and Godzilla, in contrast, embodied limited forms of destructiveness. They threatened to destroy a particular metropolitan center, but were ultimately contained by the military. Zombies, in contrast, have virally proliferated across the planet, destroyed civilization, and exterminated the vast majority of humans in the narratives in which they appear. Thus international relations scholar Daniel Drezner (2011), and even the Pentagon, have felt compelled to address the threat that the zombie poses. But the threat of the zombie is, of course, the threat of the human – the threat that our appetites pose to each other and the planet.

While cannibalism functions as a critique of universal human predation in Romero's films, he also uses it in another respect. At the end of *Land*, Romero draws an explicit connection between cannibalism and revolution. In one of his trademark depictions of failed monstrous containment, Romero inverts the cannibalistic dynamic at work in Marx's factory and in *Society*. The oppressed zombie underclass breaks into Fiddler's Green and eats the privileged elite, those narcissistic parasites who feed upon the poor and replicate a world of inequality and injustice. While the other zombies feast upon the rich, Big Daddy, machine gun in hand, pursues and eventually kills Kaufman. The hungry unconscious mass has evolved into an organized army that channels its unused and misdirected energies into the overthrow of white patriarchal corporate capitalism. We the people have awoken from the illusions of the cave, made friends with the beast, and overthrown the tyrant.

Conclusion

The zombie has broken through the boundaries of genre and medium. It has saturated American popular culture, infected political and economic discourse, and become a fixture of global entertainment. Fans have always participated in certain forms of monstrous display, but such activity has escalated during the zombie renaissance. While individuals dress in tattered, blood-stained clothes, adorn zombie makeup and stumble around the major metropolitan centers of the planet, artists and intellectuals continue to produce a vast popular, scientific and philosophical zombie literature.

What is at the root of this collective desire to know and perform the zombie? “The hardest thing to acknowledge,” writes Shaviro, “is that the living dead are not radically Other so much as they serve to awaken a passion for otherness and for vertiginous disidentification that is already latent within our own selves” (1993, p. 98). The zombie reveals the “lingering death” of the cave (Mitchell, 2005), but it also promises liberation. It speaks to our desire to escape from narrow and restrictive forms of identity; to lead a vital and creative existence; to transcend the atomization, inequality and appetitive tyranny that has plagued humanity for centuries.

For Romero, the zombie apocalypse ultimately represents his desire to clear away a dying world so that a new one may be born. Romero has stated that, in response to the failed cultural revolution of the 60s, he sought to generate the most revolutionary idea possible in order to wake people up (Monument, 2009). The zombie apocalypse is his creative response to that aspiration. He asks us to begin the difficult work of bringing about a new world based upon a balanced synthesis of freedom and discipline; equality and difference; independence and cooperation; and beastly vitality and peace. In Romero’s words, “the underbelly in all my movies is the longing for a better world, for a higher plane of existence, for people to get together. I’m still singing these songs” (as cited in Gagne, 1987, p. 6).

Conclusion

Monsters appear throughout the canon of Western political theory, but their various forms and functions have not been systematically analyzed. This dissertation has begun the work of examining the relationship between political theory and the monster. It has attempted to establish the narrative tropes, monstrous spaces and central figures of canonical monstrosity.

Canonical monster theorists know the critical importance of imagination. They realize that the ghost of disembodied reason is not sufficient to awaken the minds and stir the hearts of humanity. In order to persuade us of their arguments, they call upon fantastical creatures and horrifying images. They invite their audiences to embark upon a journey into the psychic labyrinth within. And as we are persuaded by their logical argumentation, we are also moved by their monstrous imagery.

Examining the canon through the lens of the monster reveals a mythic landscape full of snarling beasts, ferocious lions, cunning foxes, and buzzing drones; shape-shifting wolf-men, life-draining vampires and gluttonous zombies; unconscious cave-dwellers, slavish automatons, and gigantic devouring machines. These fantastic beings constitute a canonical monstruary.

Theorists use the monster to show the hidden dysfunctions and potentials of the self, and to reveal the monstrous nature of society. As a critical image of excess, the monster provides the theorist with a means to imagine and communicate the invisible conflicts that haunt the minds and bodies of the political subject. It reveals the unseen violence of our norms and institutions. It warns of the need for change, and indicates the possibility for transformation. Monster theorists believe that we must strive to clearly see

our divided and fragmented selves, our beastly appetites, and our mental delusions, so that we may collectively escape from our nightmarish imprisonment.

Perhaps the most unorthodox claim that this dissertation has advanced is that independent horror filmmaker George A. Romero is a canonical monster theorist. While a great deal of zombie literature has appeared over the last few years, this aspect of Romero has not been brought to light. By comparing his films to the horrific visions of the canon, and showing his passionate critique of political institutions, I hope to have established him as a canonical monster theorist.

Plato is a preeminent monster theorist. For those scholars who are interested in monstrosity – canonical or otherwise – Plato is worthy of a much more extensive treatment than he received in this dissertation. His model of the psychic faculties (appetite, spirit/emotion, and reason), and his theory of change (an excess in one direction eventually implodes into the opposite excess) accounts for the differences and continuities in the horrific visions of future theorists. Long before Marcuse (1955/1956) argued that Freud's insights into the psyche spoke to a specific historical period, Plato alerted us to the fact that the human personality goes through a cycle, that it manifests differently within the various forms of society, and that each form of society produces a different type of monstrous excess. His story accounts for the monsters of Hobbes, Tocqueville, and Romero, as well as the evolution of the zombie figure within American popular culture. However, as this dissertation was focused upon unearthing a correspondence between Plato's narrative and the historical trajectory of canonical monstrosity – and between his narrative and the evolution of the zombie subgenre – I

perhaps did not give enough consideration to the specificities and differences that surely separate Plato's abstract model from the historical realities of different epochs.

It may seem odd to some that this dissertation does not address sexuality, especially given the predominance of psychoanalysis within horror film scholarship. For the most part, my lack of engagement with this theme is due to the fact that my monster theorists do not explicitly engage the sexuality of the monster or the monstrosity of sexuality. Plato is a partial exception, in that he does address sexual desire in relation to his monsters, but he does not linger upon the relationship between sex and the monster. The sexuality of canonical monstrosity is therefore another possible topic for further exploration. The study of this topic would undoubtedly benefit from those scholars of Freud and Foucault who have examined the relationship between sexuality and monstrosity more generally.

There are several canonical theorists whose monstrous figures were given little or no attention in this dissertation, including Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Arendt and Foucault. A study of these thinkers would certainly modify and enrich the pattern of canonical monstrosity that I found. Indeed, the story of the monster is never finished, for "the monster stands at the threshold...of becoming" (Cohen, 1996, p. 20).

During the zombie renaissance, courses on the zombie, and the monster more generally, have begun to appear in high schools and universities across the United States. I am hopeful that this trend will continue, and look forward to further investigating the pedagogical potential of the monster, as a tool to be used in a project of collective self-examination and political transformation.

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