

The Idle Proletariat: *Dawn of the Dead*, Consumer Ideology, and the Loss of Productive Labor

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ROUGHLY HALF AN HOUR INTO THE BLOODY RAMPAGE OF George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), the four protagonists who have been fleeing the chaos of Philadelphia by helicopter come across an abandoned shopping mall. The large structure is strangely isolated from the rest of civilization, surrounded by the buffer of an empty parking lot populated by a scattering of slow-moving zombies. Needing a place to stop, eat, and rest, the four land on the roof. Feeling secure in their lofty position, they investigate the building, assessing the level of safety, and the potential spoils there for the taking. Looking down through the skylights, they see a modern-day shopping palace, complete with fully stocked stores and ample electrical power, and the few zombies roaming the concourses seem to be of little threat. Fran, the only woman in the group, looks on the ghouls and asks, "What are they doing? Why do they come here?" Her boyfriend Stephen answers, "Some kind of instinct . . . memory . . . of what they used to do. This was an important place in their lives" (Romero).

Most scholarship concerning *Dawn of the Dead* focuses on the film's rather overt criticism of contemporary consumer culture. By setting the bulk of the action in a shopping mall, Romero consciously draws the audience's attention toward the relationship between zombies and consumerism. The insatiable need to purchase, own, and consume has become so deeply ingrained in twentieth-century Americans that their reanimated corpses are relentlessly driven by the same instincts and needs. The metaphor is simple: Americans in the 1970s have become a

kind of zombie already, slaves to the master of consumerism, and mindlessly migrating to the malls for the almost instinctual consumption of goods. This heavily symbolic role reduces the monsters to little more than supporting characters; of greater interest are the four surviving humans who isolate themselves on the mall's upper levels. Having been essentially brainwashed by capitalist ideology, they cannot see the shattered world around them in any terms other than those of possession and consumption—and this misplaced drive ultimately proves strong enough to put all their lives in jeopardy.

Although I may not be proposing a radically different reading of *Dawn of the Dead* from those already provided by other scholars, I am presenting a different explanation for and approach to those established interpretations. I argue that Romero's zombies are not merely a metaphor; they are also the catalyst that reveals the true problem infecting humanity: pervasive consumerism. The surviving humans are inescapably consumers, and because the mall provides them with all the supplies they could want, they no longer have the need (or, perhaps more importantly, the ability) to produce the goods themselves. Thus in the new social paradigm of *Dawn*, surviving humans lose what Marx calls their identity as "species beings" and are reduced to the level of "life-activity" alone; any labor they do expend is for sheer survival—establishing barricades for safety, pilfering the stores for food and clothing, and seeking recreation to pass the time. According to Hegel, labor is necessary to achieve consciousness and self-awareness; by losing their productive labor, the feckless individuals living in Romero's mall ultimately lose that which makes them essentially "human," and they regress to a more primitive, animal state.

Before presenting my own analysis of *Dawn of the Dead*, I will survey much of the prevailing scholarship concerning the film and critically introduce the world created by Romero, establishing the major characters, plot structures, and themes of the movie. I will then introduce my own reading and interpretation of Romero's cultural criticism. My contribution to the ongoing discourse about *Dawn of the Dead* is to propose that in addition to criticizing the pervasive role consumerism plays in the lives of Americans, Romero is also suggesting a grim outlook for humanity, a future that will fail to realize the utopian "end of history" predicted by theorists like Alexandre Kojève and Francis Fukuyama. According to Romero, the progressive dialectic of society will ultimately stall and fail because humans only

consume—they cannot do anything else. When given the chance to transcend the framework of a late-capitalist society in an environment that provides them with all their needs, the surviving humans of *Dawn* only attempt to recreate the lost structures of society and become fatally overwhelmed by the perceived need to own rather than produce.

The New “Zombie Economy” of *Dawn of the Dead*

With *Dawn of the Dead*, the relatively innocuous zombie narrative reaches a new level of terror by depicting a full-blown global apocalypse. Technically speaking, *Dawn* is a sequel to Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). That earlier film, a cult sensation that rewrote the rules of the cinematic zombie, provides audiences with merely a small-scale zombie invasion: the action of *Night* is limited to the plight of a handful of motley refugees trapped in a rural country house over the course of just one night. *Dawn*, on the other hand, confronts audiences with a much larger picture of a worldwide cataclysm: the zombie phenomenon—one in which the recently dead have become animated in search of human flesh—is occurring on a global level, apparently affecting all corners of civilized society. In addition, Romero intentionally targets consumer culture and capitalist economics by setting the majority of *Dawn* in a shopping mall, using both the unusual setting and the symbolic zombies to offer a scathing critique of contemporary American society.

Romero’s criticism of the American economic systems of the late 1970s is realized through two primary outlets: the invading zombies and the surviving humans. Although the existence of the zombie phenomenon goes largely unexplained through the course of Romero’s films,¹ his version of the creatures seems to act with more instinct and purpose than those featured in earlier movies. With *Night*, the visionary director established two new characteristics in the monsters’ tradition—autonomy and cannibalism. Rather than being driven by the whims of a voodoo master (as in *White Zombie* [1932] and *The Plague of Zombies* [1966], for instance), Romero’s “postmodern” zombies² act largely on their own accord—they do not take orders from anyone. Furthermore, the ghouls do nothing beyond attacking humans and eating their flesh; they represent consumers on the most fundamental and primitive level (all they do is take, and what they take is food).

Whereas the voodoo zombie largely represents the slave of a colonial society, *Dawn's* creatures are a gross exaggeration of the late-capitalist bourgeoisie: blind consumption without any productive contribution.

In addition, the zombies of *Dawn* seem to retain some memory of their human lives, using tools in the most primitive manner and mimicking the actions of their former existence. Most significantly, they are physically and inexorably attracted to the mall. On the most obvious level, the ghouls desire access to the shopping center to attack and eat the humans living inside, but the zombies were present at the site long before Stephen landed the helicopter on the roof. As he explains to Fran, the zombies are drawn there by a subconscious memory; they somehow know they were once happy in such a place. This almost instinctual “drive to shop,” as it were, is repeatedly emphasized by Romero, who shows the feckless creatures pressed up against glass doors and windows, clamoring to get inside the shops and resume their earthly activities of consumption—their addiction for the place exists beyond death (Paffenroth 57). Of course, in the new zombie economy, the goods on display in the store windows are living, breathing humans, not merely clothes, jewelry, and modern gadgets.

On a purely metonymical level, the zombies represent the existing horrors of a society brainwashed by the capitalistic need to consume. According to Kim Paffenroth, the zombies are “devoid of intellect and reduced just to appetite” (23). Although they have some primitive ties to their former lives, they do not organize or act according to any kind of plan; any autonomy they manifest is a direct result of the instinctual drive to consume. Matthew Walker describes the actions of Romero's ghouls in terms of Aristotle's *pleonexia*, which he defines as “the disposition to have more” (84). Because all biological functions have ceased to exist in the zombie's dead physiology, they do not eat for sustenance—instead, they eat simply for the sake of eating.³ Philip Horne emphasizes how this insatiable appetite characteristic of Romero's zombies ideally epitomizes the excesses of modern consumerism; he writes how “‘consumer society’ is literalized in the zombies' process of ingestion; they devour human beings as they couldn't a TV or a sofa” (97). The ghouls eat and eat and eat yet always want more.

The zombies deftly represent the problems with materialism and consumer consumption existing for Romero's contemporary audience. Horne describes a society peopled by “dazed consumers, haunted by impossible yearnings, [who] shop for shopping's sake, freed from the

causal chains of necessity but feeling endlessly incomplete, hungry for the diffused excitement of pursuit and purchase” (97). This depiction certainly applies not only to the zombies of Romero but also to those in the audience as well.⁴ The comforts of a modern society come with an unavoidable (and insatiable) desire and need to *consume*. Thus for the civilization presented by Romero in *Dawn*, as A. Loudermilk points out, the real apocalypse is the end of late capitalism: “Its consumer citizenry—figuratively zombified by commercial culture—is literally zombified by those who once were us, our *simulacral doubles* as cannibal consumers” (85). Of course, while humans may act like zombies when shopping and consuming, real zombies prove to be far more dangerous; the goods they consume are the very flesh and blood of humanity.

“Civilization” itself proves to be the first victim of the zombie onslaught; the establishing scenes of *Dawn* show not only the mass chaos resulting from the supernatural invasion but also the collapse of all societal infrastructure and social organizations. The first sequences of the film depict the chaotic decay of two of the most powerful institutions in America: the media and law enforcement.⁵ *Dawn*’s first camera shot introduces Fran (Gaylen Ross), a young and successful television news producer.⁶ Amid the frantic shouts of so-called experts, reporters, and panicking technicians, Fran proves to be a level head; she takes charge of the situation and challenges the irresponsible actions of those around her. Romero quickly establishes Fran as a professional with a purpose—she has a job to do, and that labor gives her and the others at the news studio a reason to come together. This scene also introduces Stephen (David Emge), the pilot of the news channel’s traffic helicopter. He has been observing the chaos irrupting on the streets of Philadelphia from above, and he shares a plan for escape with Fran—thus Stephen also has a distinct purpose: flight and survival. Fran seems reluctant to leave her responsibilities behind, but when she learns the station will soon go off the air anyway (removing her reason to be at the studio), she agrees to join Stephen in his daring exodus.

The next sequence, an extended and horrifically violent one, shows both the police and civilians as militants gone berserk. The Philadelphia SWAT team has surrounded an apartment building housing both lawless renegades and those innocents who are harboring their zombified dead. Caucasians make up the bulk of the police force, while those inside the structure are African American, Hispanic, and Puerto Rican—an ethnic disparity emphasized by the racist epithets and

complaints hurled by some members of the SWAT team. A heated gun battle ensues, with humans shooting other humans almost indiscriminately, with no initial signs of zombies at all. The police soon storm the building to supposedly protect the innocent from the marauders and eradicate any menacing ghouls, but some of those once sworn to “protect and serve” turn on the helpless civilians—and the police are forced to turn on their own. When zombies are finally discovered in some of the apartments, the humans must unite against the more dangerous foes. Yet the resulting scenes depict humans murdering creatures that at least appear human—the uncanny nature of the zombies makes them the perfect metaphor for humanity’s already existing inhumanity.⁷

Yet amid all the action-movie chaos, some order is maintained. *Dawn*’s third principal character, Roger (Scott Reiniger), is introduced as a man of reason and purpose—as a seasoned police officer, he attempts to direct the operation, taking a younger SWAT member under his wing, and trying to curb the violence of his fellow officers. Like Fran and Stephen, Roger’s role in society is largely predicated on his productive labor—his “use value,” as it were. Roger soon meets up with Peter (Ken Foree),⁸ another police officer, and the two of them begin the grisly task of dealing with a room full of zombies in the apartment building’s basement. Confronted by dead friends and relatives that fail to “die” fully, the residents of the apartment complex have confined the zombies in the basement—treating them as possessions, not individuals—rather than see them “killed” or destroyed. During the grisly exterminations, tears stream down Peter’s face. He clearly finds the task odious and heartrending, but he and Roger do it anyway because it is their job. They find purpose and identity within the institutional apparatus of law enforcement.

Roger, a close friend of Stephen’s, takes Peter with him to join the other two at the airport to prepare for their flight. As Peter is introduced to the group, he asks Fran if Stephen is her man—this exchange, along with the group’s refusal to share cigarettes with another group of fleeing police officers, begins to establish the sense that they perceive everything in terms of ownership and commodification, a trope that will become even more important later in the film. The four survivors travel all night, stopping only in the morning to refuel at a rural airport. During their trip, they see scores of military and militia, men who have taken to the countryside to kill zombies as if hunting animals for sport. Whereas someone like Peter feels a lingering emotional

connection to the human-like monsters, the masses combing the countryside below them take great pleasure in their activities. Martial law has clearly been imposed, and average civilians have become almost as dangerous as the zombies themselves, killing for recreation and showing no remorse. The bloodlust shown by the racist SWAT officer is multiplied by the levity and insensitivity exhibited by the rural militia. American society has begun to collapse into anarchy and terror.

By the time the four heroes make it to the relative safety of the shopping mall, they have learned to fear both zombies and other humans alike, and as the film progresses, they slowly recognize that help will be long in coming—if it comes at all. Chaos and lawlessness have replaced the security of society's infrastructure; in fact, most social institutions completely fall apart. All media eventually goes off the air, the military and its most powerful weapons prove ineffectual, and the day-to-day activities of modern life come to a screeching halt. The new "zombie economy" that results undermines all the existing social and economic models and theories. In a shocking example of overkill, a grotesque kind of revolution has come to fruition—the economic base of production has been (perhaps permanently) disrupted and destroyed, and the cultural superstructure has come crashing down on the ruins. Yet the speed and severity of this "revolution" is such that humanity finds itself in shock—and the survivors' only course of action is to go through the motions of capitalist habit and to attempt to rebuild the systems of that cultural society within the confines of their new home—the shopping mall.

The Idle Proletariat: Consumer Ideology and the Death of Species Being

The insatiable pleonexic desires of the zombies in *Dawn* are manifested by the surviving humans as well. According to Romero's vision, Americans in the 1970s are basically zombies already; therefore, the mall is the perfect location to stage his morality play. Loudermilk discusses the dual role of the shopping mall during the 1970s and 1980s—social as well as commercial. People went to the mall for recreation, meeting friends and dates, window shopping, and going to arcades and movie theaters. Everyone could enjoy the mall on the same level, coming together to revel in modern society: "At the mall, we're

supposed to feel legitimized in our commodity culture, each of us part of a seemingly democratic weave of capitalism and individualism” (Loudermilk 89). Shoppers profited from a wide variety of choice and selection, allowing them almost unbridled self-expression, yet those plentiful commodities also reinforced standardized “conformist codes,” telling people what they should want and how much more they needed to work to get it (Loudermilk 89).

This quality of the mall manifests quickly in *Dawn*. After thoroughly exploring the zombie-infested building, Peter, Roger, and Stephen decide the place is exactly the kind of thing they are looking for—a “castle and keep” (Wright 41) in which to hole up and ride things out. Because they see the world only in terms of commodity, the mall represents everything they could possibly desire—food, clothing, recreation, and—perhaps most importantly—weapons and ammunition. All of their immediate and long-term needs can be satisfied by the supplies in the mall’s many stores, the place continues to enjoy electrical power, and the imposing structure itself will create a formidable and easily defended refuge. Even though Fran—who proves to be the only level head in the group—pleads with the men to simply resupply and keep flying north, the men are blinded by the sights and sounds of the mall itself; their judgment has been irrevocably clouded by the need to possess and own “things.” This consumer drive leads them to a dangerous plan: they reason they can capture the mall for their own use if they first block the outer entrances with semi-trucks and then exterminate the zombies trapped inside.

In an extended (and admittedly exciting) sequence of action and carnage, the movie reestablishes the zombies as pathetic metaphors for colonial native peoples: the humans have arrived to invade and plunder an existing, exotic location, securing the borders before wiping out the “indigenous population” in a bloodbath of reckless violence.⁹ After locking down the mall’s exits and the entrances to the various stores, Peter and Stephen enter a gun shop to prepare for their “final solution.” With explicitly tribal drum music playing in the background and taxidermied animal heads hanging on the walls, the two men fill bandoliers with ammunition, strap on pistols, and load hunting rifles. They then embark into the “jungle” of the shopping mall’s main concourse (choked with topiaries and dense foliage) to slaughter zombies at will. For the humans, the zombies are nothing more than a nuisance to get rid of. The remorse Peter showed at the beginning of the film is

gone, and Roger shoots zombie after zombie with almost orgasmic pleasure; having been uprooted from the labor systems that once gave them identity, securing the mall brings them together again as a social group with a clear purpose.

Fully secure in their new abode, the four protagonists have time to relax and enjoy the (perceived) pleasures for the taking around them. Because the essential needs of survival have been fulfilled, they have time and opportunity to enjoy themselves—they eat whatever they want, wear whatever they want, play on the indoor ice-skating rink, and pass the time in the video arcade. Loudermilk calls this rather idealized vision of the apocalypse the *Mall Fantasia* in which each character indulges in a kind of consumer utopia (93)—a fantasy of gluttony also seen in other postapocalyptic films like *The Omega Man* (1971). Two separate montages show things like Roger eating food directly from the jar, Fran putting on makeup and posing with a pistol in front of the mirror, and everyone trying on expensive clothes. Edgar Wright, director of *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), describes Romero's mall as a playground: “[F]or all the bleakness and uncertainty, there are chances to play out long held fantasies, the knowledge that essentially you can do anything” (42). Peter and Stephen even mug for the security cameras as they rob the mall's bank branch.

Yet that “play” operates on two levels: imitation as well as recreation—they are largely going through the motions of a lost life, just like the zombies. Furthermore, the four humans have become fundamentally idle; having all that they need, they do not have anything truly productive to do. The work they conducted in their former lives is no longer required—there is no news for Fran to report, no traffic for Stephen to observe, and no civil unrest for Roger and Peter to control. The consumable goods they need exist in abundance, so they have no reason to toil or labor to produce food, goods, or even extravagances—and the dialectical development of a human being from an ignorant slave to a self-aware individual hinges on labor. Hegel emphasizes in *The Phenomenology of Mind* that the consciousness of the bondsman (i.e., the worker) only comes to itself through work and labor; in short, labor “shapes and fashions the thing” (238). Thus the blessings of the mall become a curse for the hapless survivors living there; they have no real purpose or telos in their existence beyond simply existing. As Fran so astutely points out, the mall has become a prison (Romero).

The security of the shopping center's walls eventually makes them all as dead and numb as the zombies clamoring at the mall's gates; the ghouls may be trapped outside, but the heroes are just as trapped inside (Paffenroth 59). Time passes uneventfully, and the four survivors try to make their indefinite inhabitation of the mall as comfortable as possible by recreating as much of "normal life" as they can—"playing" at normalcy. To insure their safety from any marauding bands of humans that might be out scavenging (a very real threat that manifests later during the film's climax), they outfit the upper offices of the mall like an apartment—bringing up furniture, cooking supplies, and other accoutrements—and they board up the entrance to the stairwell to make it look like just another section of wall. Fran, who is pregnant with Stephen's baby, sets up house, playing the role of the traditional housewife (in spite of her former career as an independent and successful newswoman), and the men use worthless money to play high-stakes poker. The ties to the extinct social institutions are so strong that Stephen even weighs a bag of candy in the store to see how much it would cost.

All their immediate needs are fulfilled, and before long, they all begin to stagnate with nothing purposeful to do. Like the zombies, they are simply acting on instinctual memory. They consume those material goods and services provided by the mall because that is what they have been trained to believe will make them happy. Yet as Walker points out, happiness is more than just living—Aristotle makes the argument that one must flourish and live well (87). Although the surviving human protagonists have somewhat of an idealized capitalist life—unlimited consumption without the burden of labor or production—they face no challenges and have no goals. Paffenroth observes that for the survivors, "life is grindingly boring and pointless, the ultimate parody or degeneration of a domesticity that is useless without a purpose to fulfill or a goal to pursue. Human life requires challenges, and there are none in the mall where everything is free, and therefore worthless" (53). The only one with any telos at all is Fran, who worries about her unborn child and the uncertain future ahead of them.

Kojève and Fukayama, in their respective discussions on the "end of history," theorize an increase in art and aesthetic cultural production following the dissolution of profit-based consumer economics. Yet in Romero's world of *Dawn of the Dead*, this utopian transcendence fails to take place—the surviving humans are frozen in their dialectical

development. Even though they have all their material needs fulfilled by the bounties of the mall, they cannot move beyond their perception of the world in terms of commodity. They find no joy in their activities and relative freedoms because of their overwhelming obsession with possessions. In fact, they cannot see anything around them—including each other—in terms other than commodification. From the beginning of the film, Fran and Stephen are perceived as belonging to each other, and their unborn child is even portrayed as an object belonging to Stephen—something that should or should not be aborted by Peter (Fran is markedly absent from the discussion on how to handle her own pregnancy).¹⁰ Peter even sees Roger as belonging to him: when Roger eventually dies from wounds he received from a zombie and rises from the dead as a ghoul himself, Peter makes the choice to end that existence (Roger is his to do with as he sees fit) by shooting his former comrade in the head.

With Roger gone, the other three become increasingly more isolated from each other. Although they have attempted to recreate the structural apparatuses of society—the mall has been carefully transformed into a fortress, a church,¹¹ and a home, with the three remaining survivors constituting a new family community—the institutions are mere fabrications. They fail to afford the survivors with their identity and inclusion in a true society. Without his close friend, Peter is living in the past; he misses Roger, spending time alone at his friend's grave and acting as if he has nothing left to live for. Stephen seems to want to live in the present. He, more than the other two, sees the mall as a utopian paradise and wants to keep things exactly the way they are. He even proposes to Fran, giving her an expensive ring that has no real value; Fran, however, refuses the gesture, pointing out how the union would not be real. She alone is living for the future. During Roger's funeral, Romero shows her sitting alone on a bench in front of a store called "Anticipation: Maternity." The balance of the film is nothing *but* anticipation—especially for Fran—and while the other two waste their time playing games, she spends her time watering the mall's many plants.

Marx identifies humans as "species beings," for whom "the productive life is the life of the species" (75–76). In contrast, animals are consumed by "life-activity" alone (Marx 76); lower beings have nothing beyond the activities that preserve and sustain life. Humans, however, are conscious of life-activity, giving their labor a purpose that transcends the animal and constitutes the species (Marx 76). However,

with nothing to work for, with no goal beyond survival, *Dawn's* three remaining humans are forced to focus on life-activity alone—they become increasingly more estranged from each other (many of their idle activities are conducted in isolation). Even Stephen and Fran, the representative “Adam and Eve” of the postapocalypse society, are distant from one another—when shown together in bed, the two stare off listlessly in different directions. In fact, the only time the two do connect is when Stephen teaches Fran how to fly the helicopter—an activity with obvious purpose. Because the familiar systems of production, labor, and exchange values have been turned upside down, all of their attempts to recreate society and its comforting institutions prove futile. Their roughhewn society fails, and the three essentially cease to be “species beings.”

The “dream” officially ends when the three survivors are faced with yet another invasion—but this time the threat comes from other humans, not zombies. Eager to increase their collection of booty, a marauding army of militia and bikers descends on the mall to rape it of its material goods. Confident in their numbers, they mostly ignore the zombies, allowing the ghouls access to the mall when they move the trucks and open the loading dock doors. Instead, these misguided humans focus on stealing money and jewelry—things with no real value in the new zombie economy—and guns and ammunition. Although Peter pleads with Stephen to just lie low until they leave, the sight of all of their hard-won possessions being taken by others proves too much of a blow; the chopper pilot begins to shoot at the marauders, killing other humans (perhaps the most valuable commodity left in the world) in an attempt to preserve the material goods of the mall. Chaos results: the zombies end up being far more of a threat than initially thought, and many of the gang are killed before they can escape. Most tragically, Stephen is also attacked and killed—he rises again as a zombie, completing his transformation into a soulless being that cares for nothing beyond raw consumption.

The life raft of the mall is sinking fast; the zombies—perhaps driven to a frenzy after all the long weeks of waiting outside the mall doors—overrun the entire structure. Zombie Stephen, retaining some lingering memory of his former life, leads the ghouls to the hidden stairwell, breaking down the barricades, and heading up to the secret apartments above. Unfortunately, this version of Stephen cares nothing for the items on display in the stores below; he now only hungers for the flesh

of his former lover and his one-time comrade. The last two survivors must flee; Peter, having lost his lust for life already, resolves to stay behind, distracting the horde so Fran and her unborn child can escape in the helicopter. Fran wastes no time getting to the roof, but she lingers, hoping Peter will change his mind. The former SWAT officer mercifully dispatches the zombie Stephen before preparing to kill himself in like fashion. Then, for reasons never fully explained in the film, he changes his mind. Turning his gun once again on the zombies, he makes a daring dash to the roof and joins Fran in the helicopter. Although they have little fuel and no plan, they at least have a chance to start over again.¹²

By creating such a bleak vision of the apocalypse, Romero cleverly presents a scathing criticism of his contemporary 1970 culture, making a mockery of the dehumanizing effects of late capitalism and rampant consumerism. The new social order created by his four survivors at the rural shopping mall ends up being founded on hoarding and defense, not labor and production—and what labor does exist in this zombie economy is used not to create but merely to preserve. Even though the toils and rigor of capitalist society have virtually disappeared and even though the survivors sequestered in the shopping mall have all of their material and even fantastic desires fulfilled, they ultimately cannot transcend the bonds of consumer ideology. By painfully illustrating the destruction of the social systems that have become so essential in the United States of the 1970s, Romero paints not a grim dystopian vision of how things might be, but rather the way things already are. Commodities and material possessions ultimately provide no happiness; true self-actualization comes only through labor, production, purpose, and community.

Notes

1. In *Night of the Living Dead*, a news broadcaster supposes the zombies have risen from the dead because of extraterrestrial radiation brought to Earth by a satellite returning from Venus. The only explanation in *Dawn of the Dead* comes from Peter, who quotes his old voodoo-priest grandfather who once said, “When there is no more room in hell, the dead shall walk the earth” (Romero). *Dawn* implies that the human race and modern society have become so wicked and corrupt that hell cannot take on any more tenants.
2. See Steven Shaviro (1998).
3. More detailed revelations about and insights into the physiology of the zombie come in Romero’s third zombie movie, *Day of the Dead* (1985).

4. The irony of Romero's social criticism becomes all the more potent for those viewers who saw *Dawn* in a shopping mall movie theater. Although severely critical of capitalism, the film is clearly a commodity itself (see Loudermilk 85).
5. Louis Althusser calls such specialized institutions Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) (*Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New Left Books, 1971). He criticizes things like the family, the legal system, the trade union, the communications industry, and culture in general as being tools of a repressive state system (136–37). These ISAs are employed by the state to maintain the *status quo* and preserve the means of production in a capitalist society.
6. I am consciously avoiding any lengthy discussion of the gender issues presented in *Dawn of the Dead*; for a critical reading of Fran's role as a woman in the movie, see Paffenroth's *Gospel of the Living Dead*.
7. I use *uncanny* here in the psychoanalytical sense of the *Unheimlich*; see Sigmund Freud (2003).
8. Peter is played by an African American and much has been written about his racial role in the film (see Paffenroth, in particular). As with the issue of Fran's gender, I am purposely avoiding any direct analysis or discussion of Peter's race; of import to this discussion is his role as a consumer.
9. Although *Night of the Living Dead* somewhat inverts the master/slave dialectic present in the earlier voodoo-based zombie movies, *Dawn* reestablishes the old system: zombies are slaves, although in this case, their master is animalistic instinct and subconscious drive, not vindictive and plotting voodoo priests.
10. Although scholars like Paffenroth argue the virtues of *Dawn* as a progressive, "profemale" text, this key scene is a glaring example of misogynist stereotypes, emphasizing the age-old problem of women being depicted as mere commodities for men to use as exchange currency (see Luce Irigaray 1985).
11. Romero's shooting script for *Dawn* describes the mall as a "cathedral," with the pair of two-story department stores at each end representing the altars (qtd. in Horne 98).
12. Loudermilk points out that Peter and Fran are the only survivors because they have best resisted the lure of the mall—"the consumption of comforts that can never solve their real problems" (92).

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