WEEK 8: VIRUSES AND ZOMBIES
Discussion Questions, Going Viral Chapter 4

1. What kinds of anxieties were revealed in the initial wave of zombie films?

2. Which war did Night of the Living Dead protest and how did the film protest it?

3. What theory does Bishop offer for why zombie movies declined during the 1990s?

4. Why have zombie films become more relevant to post-9/11 audiences?

5. In most zombie narratives, from where does the real threat come?
6. Which themes can often be found in post-9/11 zombie invasion films?

7. Why does Danny Boyle call *28 Days Later* "a warning as well as entertainment"?

8. How did *28 Days Later* change the traditional zombie narrative?

9. What is the primary metaphor in the post-9/11 world?

10. What is the significance of the anecdote with which Bishop concludes the Introduction?
Night of The Living Dead:

- George Romero’s first feature film
- questions what it means to be human (are the zombies in any way human?)
- terror of alienation
- focus on cannibalism (far more graphic than previous zombie films)
- humans as actual threat
Night of the Living Dead Trailer (Romero, 1968)
[video clip]
1. Barbra and her brother Johnny are attacked when visiting a graveyard to honor the grave of their father.
2. Johnny is attacked and killed by a zombie.
3. Fleeing her attacker, Barbra meets Ben, who is also on the run from the recently reawakened dead.
4. They begin to set up a nearby farmhouse as a fortress and soon discover they are not alone in the house.
5. Two couples have been hiding out in the basement of the house: a young couple, Tom and Judy, and Harry and Helen Cooper, an older married couple with a young daughter who has already been bitten by one of the zombies.
7. When Ben and Harry start arguing over where the safest place in the house is, tensions are created that lead to the downfall of the group.

8. The film ends when Ben is shot by marshals who apparently mistake him for a zombie.
The “realism” of *Night of the Living Dead* is reinforced by several textual qualities:

- a world in which zombies did exist would be like the one presented
- television news in 1968 appeared in black and white, which would have given the film a documentary-like feel
- the series of gory still photographs that accompany the film’s closing credits and which recall the photojournalism of the Vietnam war
- takes place in real time (there are no forward jumps or flashbacks)
On a superficial level, narrative equilibrium is restored. However, this apparent “order” has been achieved at the cost of Ben’s life. *Night of the Living Dead* anticipates the pessimistic horror cinema of the 1970s.

—Jonathan Crane, “Come On-A My House: The Inescapable Legacy of Wes Craven’s The Last House on the Left,” *The Shocking Cinema of the Seventies*
Cause of zombie outbreak: **radiation from outer space**. Speaks to fears of a nuclear holocaust.

But...Romero’s primary interest is not in providing a detailed explanation of the disaster that has befallen America, so much as in analysing the human response to it.
Collapse of the domestic family:
1. Karen Cooper kills her parents
2. The home does not offer protection
“The film incessantly poses the question: **who is the enemy?** At first it seems obvious that it is the zombies; later, however, as the paranoid human beings fight among themselves, the distinction between human beings and zombies becomes blurred. In the final scene of the film, the difficulty of enemy recognition is horrifically exemplified when Ben is shot dead after he is misrecognised (seemingly) as a zombie (a scene which to an American audience in the 1960s must surely have resonated with the murder of the black rights leader Martin Luther King).”

—Stephen Harper, “*Night of the Living Dead: Reappraising an Undead Classic*”
In 1968, the novelty of a black hero was striking.

Ben (Duane Jones)
Race in *The Living Dead*:

- Racial issues are not explicitly foregrounded in the film.
- Dialogue makes continual reference to the ways in which racial minorities have been treated in the past in America:
  — “Chief, if I were surrounded by say six or eight of these things, would I stand a chance?”
  — “Well, if you had a gun, shoot ‘em in the head. If you didn’t, get a torch and burn ‘em, they go up pretty easy. Beat ‘em or burn ‘em.”
- The way in which the zombies are hung from trees in the final scenes of the film invokes racist lynchings.
Gender in *The Living Dead*:
Throughout the film, only the men seem to be effective in combating the zombies:

- While Ben and the other men are active, Barbra is catatonic.
- Once safe inside the house, Barbra just sits on the living room sofa for almost the entire duration of the film, until she is finally moved to action at the sight of Helen Cooper being attacked by zombies.
- Barbra is both infantilised (while Ben boards up the house, she toys with a musical box) and identified with household items, such as the linen tablecloth and the arm of the sofa which she obsessively strokes.
 Violence in *The Living Dead*:

- Stands for interracial violence in America
- Stands for Vietnam war
- Used to highlight social injustice
- Despite the metaphors, Romero strives for a sense of realism
Night of the Living Dead Intro Sequence (1968)
[video clip]
Night of the Living Dead Radio Broadcast and Fighting (1968) [video clip]
Night of the Living Dead Television Broadcast (1968)
[video clip]
Night of the Living Dead Final Sequence (1968)
[video clip]
On April 23, 1975, President Gerald Ford announced that American military involvement had come to an end, but Americans in Saigon still needed to be evacuated.

Operation Frequent Wind transported more than 1,000 Americans and more than 5,000 Vietnamese out of the city. The 19-hour operation involved 81 helicopters and is often called the largest helicopter evacuation on record.
Dawn of the Dead
• Bankrupt countries
• Environmental disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.)
• Economic meltdowns
• Oil spills
• Never-ending wars
• Climate change
• Corrupt politicians
• Growing disparity between rich and poor
• Environmental pollution
Apocalypse Soon: 9 Terrifying Signs of Environmental Doom and Gloom

Rising sea levels, earthquake threats and more reasons the world as we know it might be ending

BY JOHN KNEFEL | August 18, 2015
ZOMBIE PHASE 1: HAITI
ZOMBIE PHASE 3: VIRUSES

WARNING!

MAINTAIN THE QUARANTINE
DEADLY FORCE WILL BE USED TO PROTECT THIS AREA
DAY 1: EXPOSURE... DAY 3: INFECTION... DAY 8: EPIDEMIC...
DAY 15: EVACUATION... DAY 20: DEVASTATION...

28 DAYS LATER

THE DAYS ARE NUMBERED - 01/11/02

www.28dayslaterthemovie.co.uk

(Boyle, 2002)
28 Days Later Intro Sequence (Boyle, 2002)
[video clip]
WILL SMITH

THE LAST MAN ON EARTH IS NOT ALONE.

(Lawrence, 2007)
PLANET TERROR

A RODRIGUEZ INTERNATIONAL PICTURES

RELEASE STARRING ROSE MCGOWAN | FREDDY RODRIGUEZ | MICHAEL BIEHN
ALSO STARRING JEFF FAHEY | JOSH BROLIN | MARLEY SHELTON

(Rodriguez, 2007)
Planet Terror (Rodriguez, 2007)
Planet Terror Hospital Sequence (2007)
[video clip]
The Walking Dead (AMC, 2010-present)
The Walking Dead “TS-19” clip (AMC, Dec. 5, 2010) [video clip]
The Strain pilot ("Night Zero," FX, July 13, 2014)