License to Kill: The Meaning of 'Massacre' in *Dawn of the Dead*

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In 1978, American cinema gave birth to two important works, so similar that they could pass as twins. Each film belongs to a different genre (one is a near-future science fiction horror movie, the other a crime melodrama set in the 1910s). However, if one tries to compare them, one realizes that George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* and Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* unexpectedly have a great deal in common (1).

To begin with, both films are dramas depicting eschatological world views, both of which involve a paradise lost. Both their stories are clearly based on the Bible. Both films commonly feature four main characters, and in each case the depiction of

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these characters' lives in paradise is at the center of both the films' narrative. Life in paradise is portrayed through putting together fragmentary shots in the style of documentary films; these shots show the idle day-to-day lives of the four characters, while the dialogue is trimmed down radically. Both films' stories proceed in a similar manner: after all characters have reached paradise towards the end of their respective journeys, ruin befalls them while they are enjoying their quiet lives there and they end up being cast out again. In both films, the occasion for this fall from grace is the advent of 'loiterers'. In *Dawn of the Dead*, the role of these 'loiterers' is performed by the biker gang Hell's Angels, while the same applies to the swarms of grasshoppers (grasshoppers equipped with the power of scorpions) in *Days of Heaven* – each represent symbolic figures from the 'Book of Revelation', which bring disaster to humankind. In the process of being cast out of paradise, two of the main characters lose their lives and the stories close with the moment the surviving two set out on new journeys. So much for the main features both movies share.

The similarities between these two films (of different genres), which happen to be produced in the same year, are quite intriguing. Precisely because Romero's and Malick's other works do not give the impression of having close resemblances, should one consider such coincidental matches a reflection of their contemporariness? Perhaps; in any case, I will try to compare the corresponding elements of both works. In addition to the contrasts in both stories' historical backgrounds and world settings, there are also notable differences between the scenes that depict life in paradise. While the greatest part of the drama in *Dawn of the Dead* unfolds indoors, *Days of Heaven* focuses on outdoor scenes. The first is a film that pursues how the protagonists (two TV station employees and two police SWAT officers) barricade themselves in a large shopping mall that they use as a hiding place while crowds of mysteriously reanimated dead people invade the scene, hunting for human flesh. The second, in contrast, aims for a screen layout that focuses on the subject of natural scenery. In doing so, it shows people living on a large farm surrounded by endless wheat fields (the owner of the farm and seasonal workers) almost as equals to the wild-growing plants and animals. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conclude that these differences in location clearly distinguish both works. This is because, whether indoors or outdoors, both films' characters are just the same in the sense that they are all located in institutions or in areas that are isolated from society. The seclusion of both the farm and beautiful natural scenery in *Days of Heaven* is reflected in the insular environment of the shopping mall in *Dawn of the Dead*. Their isolation is precisely the reason why it becomes possible for both spaces to turn into paradises with the sense of loss being so great.

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A huge difference, to which attention should be paid here, lies in how life in paradise is depicted in both films. What constantly surrounds the protagonists of the respective stories who indulge in paradisiacal life? The obvious answer is: zombies (living corpses) and wheat. In other words, there is a separation occurring here between anti-natural existence and animated nature. This separation indicates the decisive point in which both works oppose each other. In *Days of Heaven*, the sight of wheat sprouts breaking through the soil from below is captured in extreme slow motion with shots inserted in the style of science films (whilst thoroughly aesthetic at the same time). This scene, which depicts the growth of life that sprouting represents over the passage of time, is a magnificent detail. A corresponding image in *Dawn of the Dead* (in terms of things inside coming out) may be the image of the inner organs dragged out from the abdomen of those humans attacked by the zombie group (a cruel manner of death). *Days of Heaven* is trying to be as faithful as possible to the course of nature (some recognize the splendid cinematography of Néstor Almendros, which makes maximum use of natural light, to be the greatest aesthetic achievement of the film). This faithfulness, amongst other things, is also obvious in the fact that a love triangle (based on physical desire and jealousy) starts budding between the protagonists. Once the migrant workers have left at the end of harvest season after busily gathering wheat, they spend a few peaceful days frolicking with the wild-growing plants and animals in the fields and on the riversides. Whereas the characters in *Days of Heaven*, though somehow struggling, are acting rationally on the surface, they are all people who are incapable of going against nature (their own desires). The love triangle leads to a collision between its two male members and ultimately culminates in murder. This situation, while accidental, is expressed in a manner suggesting that it is a result derived from the law of nature. As a matter of course, the person who has disturbed the existing order is punished and the women left behind set out for new territory in search of another companion. Thus, the possibility of life as such is positively affirmed and it is precisely the continuity of the natural ecosystem that can be called the ultimate divine providence supporting the world of *Days of Heaven*'s narrative.

In contrast, *Dawn of the Dead*'s world has been entirely immersed in 'death' from the outset; what is more, the nature of this 'death' displays extremely anti-naturalistic modalities (the abnormal situation of living corpses starting to attack the living and feeding on their raw meat). Indeed, it is also possible that the zombies' actions are based on the natural phenomenon of a culinary appetite, but this appetite, then, is just a fictitious 'craving'. This is because the zombie is a 'dead person' and as such necessarily has no need for any intake of nutrition to begin with. The zombies are simply pretending to eat, nothing more, even though this is

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done with the most serious attitude. The cannibalism in *Dawn of the Dead* is depicted as an utterly unproductive act that brings forth nothing other than more 'death' (living corpses). (Without doubt, the continuous increase in the number of zombies drives the reproductive rate of humankind towards zero as one approaches infinity.) It should be understood that the behavioral attitude of the zombies, so to speak, consists in the partial imitation of the behavior of the living (themselves at the time they were alive). Having no individual characters and acting according to the remaining faint memories of the habits of daily life (which is why they visit the shopping center), roaming around craving human flesh, the zombies resemble human imitations with simplified capabilities. However, it is not only the zombies that are imitations (copies): the shopping center itself, in which the four main characters have barricaded themselves, is depicted as a vast space of virtual reality that is completely inundated by various imitations. It is a state in which animals are stuffed, humans are mannequins, plants are artificial flowers and car races or gunned firefights take place solely in video games. Or perhaps, like the men and women in *Days of Heaven*, the main characters in *Dawn of the Dead*, who live in the shopping center as they please, might also be people who are incapable of acting against their own natural desires. The difference is that no love triangle develops between these protagonists, who are forever unable to escape their virtual reality, which is stuffed with imitations. Shortly after her arrival at the hiding place, the female TV station employee is treated as a burden after her pregnancy is discovered. When she subsequently receives a marriage proposal by her male partner, she refuses it as premature. As they spend their time surrounded by artificial objects, both gradually transform into beings who, like the zombies, merely imitate 'humanness'. Even though they belong to the living, they ultimately fail to reproduce. Daily life at the shopping center amounts to no more than pretending to lead a normal domestic life. Necessities such as food and daily essentials will probably run out sooner or later. Paradise is a place with a time limit. If one were to go outside, one would constantly be preoccupied with the completely nonsensical (anti-natural) act of killing the already dead (zombies) with the chances of survival approaching zero. Only one person, the female TV station employee, carries new life (the possibility of life) within her, yet there is no guarantee of a safe delivery. *Dawn of the Dead*'s anti-natural picture of the world does not bring forth anything new; it is set up as a place for dying that leads nowhere.

If this is the case, why does Romero choose to fabricate such a picture of the world? Why is *Dawn of the Dead* necessarily set in a large shopping mall comparable to a virtual reality space? And why does it make use of creatures as unnatural as 'living corpses'? To consider these issues is the main task of this article. In order to do so,

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it is necessary to clarify first the meaning of *Dawn of the Dead* in the context of film history.

To begin with, the epochal significance of *Dawn of the Dead* is usually attributed to the fact that it attempts to describe the situation of a 'massacre' in an uncompromising way, which overall is both legitimate and makes it possible for the viewer to empathize with it. The mutual killing between humans and zombies advances within a necessity-of-survival scenario, but that does not change the fact that the images in which this is displayed, represent a scene of 'murder': ruthless killing unfolds recklessly. Numerous head-smashing strokes and shots intended to immobilize zombies occur relentlessly. We, the viewers, are in a position where we can take in these scenes of limitless atrocities in a state of relaxation from beginning to end. Without even thinking about criticizing the protagonists, who are the executors of such selfish murder, we even consent to it and see it as an appropriate act, which is why we are able to keep on watching. The group of four main characters comprised of the men and women working for the TV station and the two SWAT team members, are neither embodiments of justice nor coldhearted villains, but simply people who try to avoid danger and survive, as most of us would. They are neither murderers for their own pleasure, nor do they have to carry out the annihilation of the enemy as their professional duty (the two SWAT team members only do so on their first appearance). They 'kill' for the simple reason that they must at that moment (if not, they will be devoured and killed themselves). The viewer who looks at the state of such 'murder', which does not even appear overdone, and who feels deeply refreshed by looking at it, will probably not feel any guilt or remorse. This is because those being shot to death indiscriminately by the protagonists are 'dead people'.

All things considered, the circumstance of 'murder' is a major subject matter that popular film genres (or even a large number of films that do not belong to that category) choose to depict. Which is why Hollywood writers continuously keep exploring the 'legitimacy' of these (illegal) acts of violence. From mainstream blockbusters to the low-budget films of independent productions – the task consists in incorporating into the narrative the representation of a 'doubtlessly realistic' murder that satisfies the viewers' visual curiosity as well as their sadistic taste. As can be inferred from the unswerving popularity of the three big low-budget (film) genres – porn, violence and horror – shots of 'murder' consistently draw in large parts of the audience, nearly as often or even more than sex scenes. Maybe we ought to consider that the explicitness of the acts determines the value of those shots. 'Murder' is an action that clearly and efficiently separates a serial drama into segments. Moreover, scenes of 'murder', or else 'unnatural death', work tremendously well as a start and an end point of a story. They also provide an

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opportunity to stir up the evolution of a story and, more than anything, they fulfill the function of a visual stimulant very effectively. Just as much as they represent a serious crisis not unrelated to real life (the fear of imminent death), for the totality of viewers watching them, 'murder' scenes convey an appropriate feeling of reality, however detached from reality and unusual their images may appear. Even scenes in which grotesque monsters or extraterrestrials with elusive screen presences commit murder do not look like fabricated shots utterly devoid of any sense of reality (in these scenes people's death itself is the link to reality). Exactly because those being killed are humans, such scenes probably stimulate the viewer through horrible images more or less accompanied by a sense of certainty. Incomprehensible 'murder' scenes as such barely exist. Even if, for instance, the action of taking someone's life is not shown directly, there can hardly be anyone who fails to grasp the meaning of dead bodies and absence.

In any case, there is a need for 'murder' in 'narrative cinema'. This entails that an adequate situational setting for 'murder' to be able to occur, meaning 'lawfulness', is required. We may be in an age when the scheme of good winning over evil is undoubted, and everyone can feel satisfied with a drama that depicts the clear and simple binary opposition between hero and villain (or, an age when the scheme of a clear and simple binary opposition *per se* is increasingly used). If so, then the idea of 'justice' fully suffices for the 'legitimacy' of 'murder' scenes. Should one get tired of such a structure, one can invert the respective positions of those who represent good and evil and set everything up as a crime film in which 'injustice' is the subject. The only thing that then remains to be done is to focus on the psychological conflict of the person who commits the 'murder' and to expand the variety of motives. In stories which use occasional crime, the construction of external circumstances that contribute to the occurrence of an incident may substitute for the explanation of a motive. During the 90s, the pleasure-guided murderer type, for whom *Silence of the Lambs* is representative, was most influential (2). The 'pleasure murder' setting creates the necessity of a 'murder' with an intention. In some cases, turning the exploration of a moral problem into the central topic is also recognized as a procedure to 'legitimize' those films that depict irrational 'murder'. There are countless 'loopholes to the law'.

However, even if one is successful at depicting 'murder' as necessary for the unfolding of a drama, it may not be advantageous to cut the empathy circuit that appeals to a mainstream audience. The more an incident in a film is pictured as 'unfounded murder', the less it can count on the viewer's empathy. If we assume that the details of an incident have to be delivered all the more precisely because there is a huge discrepancy with ideas commonly accepted by the world, then the narrator (screen layout) should follow a plot line that is as clear as possible. Still,

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the easy comprehensiveness of a narrative does not necessarily relate to the empathy of the general public because the spectrum of what the various viewers individually imagine as the 'legitimacy' of a 'murder' is not monochrome. There is such a thing as a tolerance level on the side of the viewer as well. This tolerance level is regulated by the political/religious beliefs and the numerous and various insights gained from experience. A father with a past in which his son was shot dead by a police officer, will probably feel that *Dirty Harry* is a film difficult to approve, however well-made it may appear (3).

In other words, the possibility for empathy enabled by a cinematic scene can only be established through the anticipation of a largest common divisor. Even with filmic expressions of 'murder' derived from an elaborate logic, there is simply no one who is ignorant of these being illegal acts, which are difficult to consider as good conduct to be publicly applauded. The great majority of the audience should have an understanding of murder as an act that has to be avoided as strictly as humanly possible. The approval of murder by any human being can only result in actual self-denial. It is logical to refuse to be killed, unless one has suicidal thoughts. The voyeuristic tastes of the audience ask for images which are real and close to truth; at the same time, the majority probably wishes to keep singularly cruel 'murder' within the realm of fiction. Randomly scaring the audience is not enough. Works that additionally fail to take into account the empathy circuit (or antipathy as the backside of it), have a tendency to lose their mainstream appeal. Having said that, for reasons stated above, those filmmakers aiming for maximum profit are eager to include plenty of graphic 'murder' scenes. For that purpose, they have to bring in 'lawfulness', which is tightly linked to the empathy circuit. Ideally, these are works able to gain the approval of everyone, despite killing numerous people within their stories. A dramatic model, in which the difference between truth and fiction remains subtle is best: while provoking anxiety that fiction could become reality anytime, it at the same time leaves room for the optimism that it will never actually happen. A good example may be *Titanic*, the greatest hit in the history of film, which depicts how a large number of people dies at once (4). (Despite being a cinematic adaptation of real events, the viewers are able to watch the pandemonium of a horrible catastrophe from beginning to end, because it unfolds as a drama that shows incidents long past). *Titanic* did not draw in its large audiences because it is an unhappy love melodrama**.** It reached its record-setting box office grosses exactly because it showed a large number of deaths. Yet, in order to attempt to depict such a large number of deaths, it necessarily required the empathy circuit provided by the unhappy love melodrama. This link is at the core of *Titanic*. A 'massacre' that provokes so many shocks that the viewers will want to avert their gaze, while at the same time arousing even deeper empathy –

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Hollywood writers are racking their brains 24/7 in order to come up with such a situation.

The common divisor that serves as the quickest and easiest motive for the 'justification' of 'murder' in film is doubtless 'justice'. Yet, it is tricky to figure out a 'justice' that does not downgrade to 'self-righteousness'. As long as it is impossible to showcase the perspective of a universal 'justice', the relationship of 'murder' with 'lawfulness' that links to the empathy circuit, will always remain fluid. Now, even narrating a drama with a clear and simple binary opposition requires the imagination of various settings that accommodate historical changes, and filmmakers cannot remain insensitive to this. It goes without saying that a film cannot ignore the political reality of its time. For example, especially after it became problematic in Hollywood to make 'native Indians' appear as 'bad Indians' (the evil ones) in films, it was necessary to concentrate the imagination on the creation of settings in which two sides (good and evil) oppose each other (in a manner that would be accepted by more audience groups). The 'justice' established by the allied nations after World War II immediately ceased to apply due to the aggravation of the East-West conflict. At this point, it goes without saying that after the second half of the 1960s, the 'justice' upheld by the United States of America became a subject of criticism unparalleled until then, due to the rise of countercultures and the oppression of its civil rights movements, the successive assassinations of political leaders and the Vietnam War turning into a quagmire. Of course, during the Cold War, the strained relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union encouraged the production in quick succession of war action films that featured behind the scenes personal conflicts and proxy wars. The same applies for films produced after the Cold War on battles with anti-American terrorists (mainly radical Muslims) and other topics, as well as crime dramas and secret information suspense dramas that involve the criminal investigation/intelligence agencies (FBI, CIA, NSA and so on). This means that the war against domestic and foreign 'enemies of the people' was chosen as the necessary setting to invoke large-scale 'murder'.

Meanwhile, national 'justice' becomes but an object of distrust. The irritation of John Rambo, the former Green Beret and Vietnam veteran in *First Blood* (5), was addressed precisely to the extremely fraudulent 'justice' of the United States. Sometimes 'justice' turns into an oppressive attitude that tyrannizes the individual and, as a means of rebellion against that, a different form of 'justice' comes to the fore. Since the 1980s, an anti-discriminating 'justice' called 'political correctness' has spread in real society, however, such good sense is difficult to use as a pretext for depicting 'murder'. No one knows where 'justice' is nowadays: is there nothing left but to conclude that only dramas that reaffirm this unsettling (suspenseful)

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situation – quite paradoxically if you will – make it possible to express 'murder' in the name of 'justice'? (In fact, in many suspense thrillers, the character who enters the picture as the champion of justice is actually the least trustworthy.) What seems certain anyway is that in Hollywood films the ideological significance of 'justice' is no longer relevant and instead immediately becomes incorporated in parodic expressions. As you know, we are at a point where the current President himself turns to film and, in response to '9:11', accepts the use of parody on his own initiative.

It is possible that for most Hollywood films, the White House of recent years is mostly material for caricature. Since the 1990s, Hollywood writers have made numerous presidents of the United States appear in their movies. Their imaginations keep anticipating the real political situation, maybe because they are constantly proposing the same kind of project idea. Year by year, as technology progresses, advanced information societies keep speeding up the airing of news flashes and preliminary figures (be they true or false). In such a society, even presidential intrigues (for instance the measures taken to cover up the President's adultery with the ex-White House intern that became a problem for the former political administration) are being disclosed while still current news. That the actual state of 'justice' in an America that determinedly presses forward with the pursuit of an imperialistic hegemony is just hollow, and follows the doctrine of putting oneself first, has become increasingly clear since '9:11'. Yet, the current administration will not shed its belligerent attitude. If this landscape provokes a chilly sense of déjà vu, then Hollywood is one part of the reason. It is now a well-known story that the former president who provoked the sex scandal carried out the aerial bombing of Iraq as if he was following the intrigue depicted in the black political comedy *Wag the Dog* (6). Even the generally cowboy-style statements by the current President addressed at anti-American terrorists and all sorts of 'rogue nations' were previously caricatured in the SF parody *Independence Day* (7).

So where *is* 'justice' nowadays? Perhaps it is better to say that, at present, it seems that 'justice' is only prospering within the delusions of the individual. The rapid development and spread of information technology has exceptionally increased the possibilities for document-verification (in Japan, we are at an age where the results of a 15-year-old girl's investigation on the truth behind the 'Wakayama poisoned curry incident' using free internet research is published as a book and the precision of the results create a huge stir) (8). At present, conspiracy theory interpretations on the internet have turned into common practice. As part of a larger discussion on keeping track of the state of affairs in Afghanistan after '9:11', a debate on whether the Osama Bin Laden featured in an Al-Qaida video is real or a double immediately spread after the video's release. On the other hand, the

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trend towards legalizing electronic surveillance through the construction of communication interception programs such as Echelon or Carnivore, the installation of surveillance street cameras and the development of medical technologies such as implantable biochips and other various techniques for authenticating the individual, has increased the skepticism of some net users. The increased efforts of both government agencies and non-governmental organizations in pushing for a system of information management has stirred the unease of a 'privacy crisis' and ultimately will drive us all into paranoia. At present, when we must live depending on all sorts or kinds of (unproven) information that wildly circulate through a multitude of communication media (while the frequency of misunderstandings increases), it is inevitable that our thinking will become delusional (paranoid). Nevertheless, this paranoia sometimes is effective as a means for accepting reality, if we channel it into what we may call a pursuit of a healthy and proactive potentiality. As such, paranoia can become a key to plotting policies of resistance against an excessively controlled society. One may acknowledge the condition of a contemporary 'justice' here. Delusions often turn people into complaint-loving pessimists and encourage anti-socialism, but that still must be better than to not think at all, at least right now. Of course, there is little sense in wasting time trying to investigate whether the 'powers of darkness' depicted in conspiracy dramas such as *Conspiracy Theory* or *The X Files* really exist (9). The delusional imagination precisely ought to be used for a creative activism aimed at resisting a self-righteous 'justice' in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, many films, which currently depict 'murder' in the name of 'justice', necessarily have to turn into cynical parodies. I cannot help having this opinion, whatever intention the makers may have had. Because whenever I watch the films, I am overcome by an impression of repetition that is stronger than anything. Also the back of my mind is crossed by the thought that there is a conflict with reality (even though not on a general level). This is why currently it is rather easier to make dramas that show a person who rejects the joint ownership of a general conscience and sense of justice, or dramas that show how someone utterly devoid of humanity kills or is being killed. Yet, 'corruption' has also been the premise of contemporary society since the end of the war. Thus, it is difficult to balance the gap between those who increase their suspicion and those who persist with their indifference, because everyone is so sick of it. Having lost a proper idea of 'justice', Hollywood-like spectacles fail to find adequate means in order to convince both groups, apart from depicting 'murder' as an instinct-driven act or relying on the material of historical events (empirical facts). If we assume that the 'lawfulness' of 'murder' can now only be shown through instinct-driven creatures (monsters) such as a superhuman murderer like Hannibal Lecter, or the dinosaurs

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in *Jurassic Park*, or the insect army in *Starship Troopers*, then Hollywood has no other choice but to dissociate the scenes of its stories from the present (everyday occurrences) (10). Having undergone the digital revolution, the contemporary world of daily life has turned into a topic of poor appeal for Hollywood (because there is little necessity for the use of special visual effects technology). In fact, during the 1990s, Hollywood produced multiple films which mainly depict parallel worlds, the near-future or historical facts (the success of the aforementioned *Titanic* has to be understood within this context). The cyberspace in *The Matrix* was set up to make the viewers forget about their contemporary social situation and to achieve their smooth immersion into a fictional world (11). This is an empathy circuit, meaning 'lawfulness', indicating: 'Whatever you do ("murder" included, of course), you will be forgiven'.

For Steven Spielberg, who was the first to incorporate the above-mentioned strategies, the 1990s were a fulfilling decade in terms of box-office revenues and critical acclaim. Spielberg, who depicted an 'instinct-driven murder' in the *Jurassic Park* series, introduced the historical fact of World War II as an empathy circuit when he directed the two films *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan* (12). Spielberg justified the theatrical 'lawfulness' of the cruel 'murder' scenes by accepting them as established historical fact, and thereby transforming them into a 'good reason' to cinematically adapt the Nazi genocide on the Jewish people. He then used this same method for visualizing the gruesome scene of the landing operation in Normandy. Both were wise choices typical of Spielberg, allowing him to shoot the spectacles of large-scale 'massacres' within today's political reality.

Of course, I also do understand people pointing out to me that these interpretations are the exact reverse of what is true. Viewpoints according to which the cruel 'murder' scenes are just a byproduct of Spielberg's actual intent, which was solely to give a critical picture of the Holocaust, make sense to me as well. After all, Spielberg himself is Jewish American. However, just because he has made so many so-called 'films for children', ignoring the 'sadism' of the director of *Duel* and *Jaws* would mean to overlook something based on narrow-minded preconceptions (13). (For example, Spielberg inserted horror film-like depictions of the destruction of human bodies even into that action-adventure series *Indiana Jones*. Moreover, in *Poltergeist*, which he wrote and produced himself and for which he chose Tobe Hooper as director, he makes a pile of dead bodies appear at the end.) (14) One can say that Spielberg's 'taste for cruelty', which has been ever more present since the beginning of the 1990s, is already a matter of common knowledge among some cinephiles. Ironically, one cannot doubt that the Nazi-critical film *Schindler's List* has deepened the sadistic expression of Spielberg's films. The cinematic adaptation of the facts in Oscar Schindler's biography (his

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rescue of Jews) gave Spielberg the 'lawfulness' (the right) to resurrect (direct) the cruel actions of the Nazis in a 'real' way.

Visually communicating the tragedy of the Holocaust in an understandable manner was a standard way for Hollywood-like spectacles to express criticism of Nazism. At the same time, this was also an occasion for Spielberg to direct realistic scenes of violence. Most of the 'murder' scenes in *Schindler's List* are composed from the perspective of a 'third party' (Schindler standing between Nazis and Jews). In the story**,** Schindler has to be a Nazi party member, while he saves a large group of Jews at the same time. To be able to carry out his task, he strategically has to take on the position of an onlooker. Spielberg uses Schindler's viewpoint and uncompromisingly shows the Nazis' merciless 'killing' numerous times in the visual expression of news images. This pseudo-documentary technique widely in use during the 1990s, was one efficient style, which allowed for depicting the sight of murder in an especially graphic (or showy, depending on one's viewpoint) manner. However gory the ways of dying are made to be, the impression created of news-style images makes them appear plausible and will easily make many viewers believe that reality may have actually looked like that. One might say that clever Spielberg has understood this better than anyone else. Some scenes of *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan* depict killings of splatter film-level cruelty. Regardless, they were highly rated as Academy Award candidates after their release (the former ultimately won Best Picture and seven categories in total, while the latter was rewarded with Best Director and won five categories in total). Moreover, they achieved success at the box-office as well. The reasons for this are obvious: based on the empathy circuit of a largest common divisor – namely the common understanding that the mass violence of war is nothing but an irrationality – it becomes possible for the viewer to keep watching the spectacle of a 'slaughter' as an onlooker without any responsibilities and within a safe entertainment environment. This common divisor probably even has the effect of convincing the viewer that watching devastating 'murder' scenes as such can be a critical attitude toward the subject matter shown. In addition, it should perhaps be pointed out that in both above-mentioned films the 'onlookers' take on a similar critical position. Either way, it is time that I return to the discussion of *Dawn of the Dead*.

It is already clear that one can say that George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* anticipated the context of filmmaking explicated above that was typical for the 1990s. No-one will put a person through the mill for having killed a multitude of 'living corpses'. The reason that the characters in the film have to extinguish all zombies is that this is an indispensable prerequisite for them to survive. I noted earlier that the large shopping mall in *Dawn of the Dead*, in which the main

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characters barricade themselves, is a virtual reality space; obviously this is an interpretation that makes the shopping mall synonymous with the cyberspace of *The Matrix*. Moreover, it is a fictional extraterritorial space with a circuit, (meaning 'lawfulness') that indicates 'Whatever you do, you are forgiven'. In fact, the four main characters of *Dawn of the Dead* turn the interior of the shopping mall, which naturally provides all daily necessities including luxury goods and a selection of small arms, into their own personal paradise and begin to live there to their heart's content. Actually, not only the shopping mall, but the whole world of *Dawn of the Dead*'s story is connected to this extraterritorial circuit. Without doubt, this is because it represents an all-out survival environment, ruled by the law of anti-nature. Having secured for themselves a safe place, the protagonists 'kill' (render immobile) (the imitations of) humans, who are supposed to be dead all along, in order to survive (not being devoured). Rumor has it that this storyline was taken over by the family computer game series *Resident Evil* in the 1990s (15). In any case, *Dawn of the Dead* certainly has the feel of something close to a computer game. Because the zombies have the shape of humans, the 'killing' scenes look 'real', and because they are also monsters, they can 'kill' uninhibitedly. (Such a setting has nothing to do with the exercise of 'justice', nor with the achievement of 'vengeance'; but it is a useful strategy to continuously divert users, whose interest is pure entertainment, with a 'killing game'.) The act of 'humans killing humans' in *Dawn of the Dead* is turned into pure action without any relation to the problem of delinquency. Nevertheless, Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* is of course not a film that endorses murder, even though one can never be entirely sure. Now, the function of the zombies as characters extends to more than being just human flesh cannibals. It may be time for us here to move on from the opinion that *Dawn of the Dead* is an action film in which 'humans kill humans'. It is a fact that those 'killed' by the main characters are 'dead people'. However, the meaning inherent in these 'living corpses' is profoundly related to the problem of film (media) as such.

So who or what is it that gets 'killed' here? *Dawn of the Dead* opens with a shot capturing the figure of Fran, the female TV station employee, leaning against the wall while being tormented by a nightmare until a colleague grabs her by the shoulder and shakes her so she wakes up. The TV station she is working for is in the middle of showing a breaking news program as the world has collapsed into turmoil after zombie attacks have broken out everywhere. While she is supposed to have woken up from her nightmare, Fran learns that nightmarish circumstances have taken over real life as well. Waking up no longer works as an exit to escape from nightmares; it has transformed into an entrance to actual horror: dream and reality have become contiguous to each other.

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That the opening scene depicts what is happening inside of the TV station is significant in two ways. First, the information required in order to understand the world which the story describes (the important zombie-related setting) is explained concisely through the dialogue between the expert and the news anchor, who appear on the program. This explanation complements the scene of Fran's rude awakening (reality and dream being contiguous to each other). Furthermore, both scenes also lay the groundwork necessary for the ensuing drama to unfold into a fight for survival within a virtual (game-like) space. Having woken up, Fran immediately looks at the monitors in the studio control room. The film then carefully details the view of the studio during the live broadcast – the sequence of shots inserted here shows the screens of numerous monitors as well as the views from TV camera finders in rapid succession. This sequence may also be seen as the transfer of (the images of) Fran's nightmare: her nightmare connects with the reality she wakes up to and even merges with the monitors in the control room as well as the shots taken by the TV cameras (while it is also clarified through the statements of the expert and the news anchor). All of this strongly reinforces the image of a nightmarish reality. It tells us that Fran's dream, the reality before our eyes, and media journalism, are all in the same nightmarish state right now. By means of dream, reality and even media images being thereby assimilated (turned into a nightmare), the world of *Dawn of the Dead*'s narrative is set up as a battleground for survival that lacks any outside (refuge, meaning reality after awakening).

Now, what is born in this moment, when dream and reality become one? Well, a film defined as a virtual reality (living corpses). As explained, *Dawn of the Dead* takes the middle ground between dream and reality. Similarly, the zombies as 'living corpses' are nothing other than creatures who function as mediators between life and death. The zombies who act like the living while belonging to the dead, have the role of invalidating the contrast between life and death as they stand at the threshold of both. Thanks to the zombies, human life and death invert positions and ultimately lose their respective meanings by becoming identical. Those attacked by the zombies, whilst dying, are resurrected by themselves becoming living corpses (unless their bodies are not entirely ravaged). Still, that does not necessarily signify their immortality. Once their craniums are smashed, zombies are immobilized for good, even though they may be creatures that transcend life and death. This is why the only thing important for the humans during *Dawn of the Dead*'s survival battle, is to verify whether their opponents are capable or incapable of moving after killing them. Which is exactly why their 'slaughter' in the film turns into plain (and thoughtless) action. In other words, the film features a war game that bets on its right to present action scenes. It is difficult to imagine any state of war less meaningless and remote from 'justice' than that.

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On the other hand, the greatness of *Dawn of the Dead* relies on having depicted precisely that.

Now, let us move on to a different topic and assume that *Dawn of the Dead* is a metaphor for film. This assumption renders what is happening in the shopping mall quite symbolic. For what unfolds there is something similar to a children's game between film and television in which the aim is to take the other's home base (the competition for the right to action scenes). The main characters, including the two TV station employees, exterminate the zombies (meaning, the film) in order to turn the shopping mall into their paradise. As is commonly known, this is something that has actually happened since the 1960s (when television became the representative mass medium instead of film). In this case, the shopping mall represents the Hollywood studios, which were formerly called 'dream factories' (which doubtless is yet another virtual reality space). The four characters living their paradise-like life there pretend to be bank robbers, or apply extravagant make-up in the style of silent film actresses, or dress up like the gunmen in Westerns. When dressed up they enjoy luxurious dinners, or skate or play squash, in short they play many different 'roles'. TV (or TV-like characters) show us how they imitate film (or film-like characters), which have been driven out of the studio, so to speak. If the main characters are agents of television, the 'role' of the zombies, who are outside of the shopping mall, having been chased from it, could be that of 'good old American cinema' (16) of the time when the studio system was firmly in place. As if to underline this, there are many individual 'living corpses' appearing in *Dawn of the Dead*, wrapped in various costumes such as that of a nurse, a baseball player, a nun, a swimmer, a dancer, a gunman and so on. From this angle, the extremely simple action that the zombies exhibit, also seems to remind one of the conciseness and clearness characteristically embodied by 'good old American cinema'. Moreover, the biker gang attacking the shopping mall in the second half of the film, which reminds me of *Easy Rider*, would be 'American New Cinema'. Should one then conclude that the climactic scene taking place in the shopping mall is the depiction of the unfolding of a (three way) battle for survival between old and new American cinema as well as television in a paradise that represents the 'dream factory' (or the afterimage of the studio system turned into ruins)? In any case, the never-ending nightmare, which *Dawn of the Dead* lays out (the triune virtual reality space in which the images of dream, reality and media merge), may also represent the trauma of film (historical) memory. This is the trauma generated by information media – needless to say, shaking off a proliferating group of innumerable zombies is a next to impossible undertaking for us.

While there exists an uncountable number of zombie films, I have focused here solely on Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, which has had the largest impact on its own

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genre. Romero already used the setting in which 'living corpses' attack humans and feed on their raw meat in his first theatrical release *Night of the Living Dead*. However, for investigating the problem of visual expressions of 'massacres' in film, I cannot think of a better movie than *Dawn of the Dead*, which takes the cruel depiction of a 'mutual killing' to another level. *Dawn of the Dead* is not superior because it includes the element of a 'human drama' – which, as is generally said, shows how human beings react to extreme circumstances and implies a critique of mass consumerism. Certainly, some significance can also be seen in its caricature of contemporary society, as it puts a life barricaded in a large shopping mall at its core. On top of this though, one has to admire the fact that it has expressed 'murder' in strictly thoughtless action scenes, while laying out the issue of a 'massacre'. Normally, the depiction of 'murder' in film is backed by some kind of 'lawfulness'. *Dawn of the Dead* should be highly valued precisely because it discloses 'murder' as no more than the 'real' effect of a visual stimulation and thus utterly normal. Moreover, it unfolds as a drama that invalidates the binary opposition between good and evil and life and death. Whereas *Night of the Living Dead*, which is the first in Romero's *Living Dead Trilogy*, is extremely important in the history of zombie films, *Dawn of the Dead*, which was shot as its sequel, is without a doubt a miraculous work – one that was able to invalidate the way in which American cinema treats violence (the violence of murder) as a necessary evil. It is due to the existence of *Dawn of the Dead* that American cinema is able to realize 'murder' to this day.

NOTES

(1) Director George A. Romero (1940-2017) wrote the horror film in collaboration with Dario Argento. It is the second overall of six in Romero's zombie film series *Night of the Living Dead* (1968-2009). *Days of Heaven* is Terrence Malick's second feature film and was written and directed by him.

(2) *Silence of the Lambs* is a 1991 horror thriller directed by Jonathan Demme. Anthony Hopkins played the pleasure-guided murderer Hannibal Lecter.

(3) *Dirty Harry* is a 1971 crime action thriller directed by Don Siegel and the first in the *Dirty Harry* series (-1988). Its protagonist is a San Francisco Police Department Inspector played by Clint Eastwood.

(4) *Titanic* is a 1997 drama directed by James Cameron. It is a fictionalized account of the sinking of the RMS Titanic in the North Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912. At the same time, it depicts the budding romance between its two protagonists Rose DeWitt Bukater and Jack Dawson played by Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio.

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(5) *First Blood* (1982) was directed by Ted Kotcheff and is the first film of the *Rambo* film series (1982-2008) starring Sylvester Stallone as John Rambo.
(6) *Wag the Dog* is a 1997 black comedy directed by Barry Levinson.
(7) *Independence Day* is a 1996 science fiction film co-written and directed by Roland Emmerich.
(8) In the 'Wakayama poisoned curry incident' (*Wakayama dokubutsu karē jiken*), a woman named Hayashi Masumi poisoned bowls of curry she distributed at a summer festival on 25 July 1998 with arsenic. Two children and two adults died in the incident.
(9) *Conspiracy Theory* is a 1997 political action thriller directed by Richard Donner. *The X Files* is a science fiction television series created by Chris Carter in 1993. The eleventh season of the series premiered on 3 January 2018.
(10) *Jurassic Park* is a 1993 science fiction adventure film directed by Steven Spielberg. It is the first film in the *Jurassic Park* franchise. The fifth film *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* directed by J. A. Bayona was released in June 2018. *Starship Troopers* is a 1997 science fiction action film directed by Paul Verhoeven.
(11) *The Matrix* is a 1999 science fiction film directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski. It had two sequels *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*, which both came out in 2003.
(12) *Schindler's List* came out in 1993, *Saving Private Ryan* in 1998.
(13) *Duel*, a 1971 thriller, was Spielberg's first feature film as a director. *Jaws* appeared in 1975.
(14) The *Indiana Jones* franchise began in 1981 with *Raiders of the Lost Arc*. Its fourth film *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* was released in 2008. *Poltergeist*, which Spielberg wrote and produced, came out in 1982.
(15) *Resident Evil* was released in Japan by Capcom in 1996. Its Japanese title is *Biohazard*.
(16) Classical Hollywood Cinema.

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