Screaming undead – Thomas Örn Karlsson

A Deal with the Devil?: Zombies vs. Tricksters as Cinematic Magic

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Abstract | From the beginning, cinema has been intertwined with magic as illusion. The magic of cinema not only provides the illusion of reality, it can also create fantastic creatures, marvelous stories, and imaginary worlds. While movie zombies are currently in vogue – embodying anxieties of soulless, brain dead individuals – the perfect antidote to the zombie can be found in the figure of the trickster. The trickster's role is often to breathe new life into lifeless people and petrified situations by causing mischievous and usually humorous chaos. Although movies can function as "zombies" when they reinforce clichéd ideas, stereotypes or "soul-less" stories, cinema can also operate as a kind of meta-trickster to help us re-imagine ourselves and our world. "Fantastic" cinema (fantasy, sci-fi, gothic horror, etc.) represents the epitome of a type of story that can help re-ignite our imagination and help us re-conceive what we thought we knew. It can also help us re-imagine what we believe to be possible or impossible in the real world. And because cinema itself is founded

on trickery (illusion of motion, etc.) and has its roots in many traditional magical tricks, the trickster can serve as a potent metaphor for imaginative and speculative narratives of cinema.

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Resumo | Desde os seus primórdios que o cinema se interliga com a magia como forma de ilusão. A magia do cinema não só cria a ilusão da realidade, como também cria criaturas fantásticas, histórias e mundos imaginários. Enquanto que os zombies cinematográficos estão actualmente em voga - incorporando as ansiedades de indivíduos anímicos e acéfalos – o antídoto perfeito para o zombie pode ser encontrado na figura do *trickster*. O papel do *trickster* passa, frequentemente, por dar nova vida a pessoas sem vida e a situações petrificadas, causando um caos malicioso e normalmente humorístico. Apesar dos filmes poderem funcionar como "zombies" quando reforçam ideias *cliché*, estereótipos e histórias "sem alma", o cinema pode também assumir-se como uma espécie de meta-*trickster* que nos ajuda a reimaginar o nosso mundo e a nós próprios. O cinema "Fantástico" (fantasia, FC, horror gótico, etc.) representa o epítome de um tipo de história que pode reacender a nossa imaginação e ajudar-nos a conceber, de uma nova forma, aquilo que pensávamos saber. Pode também ajudar-nos a reimaginar o que acreditávamos ser possível ou impossível no mundo real. E porque o cinema em si é baseado em enganos (ilusão de movimento, etc.), e tem as suas raízes em muitos truques de magia tradicionais, o *trickster* pode servir como uma forte metáfora para as narrativas imaginativas e especulativas do cinema.

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As the title indicates, this essay frames cinema through the metaphorical lens of magic, devils, zombies, and tricksters. All of these terms are particularly relevant to "fantastic" cinema, my preferred term for movies that encompass fantasy, science fiction and gothic horror. Because so many films are hybrids, drawing from more than one of these generic traditions, I find the term fantastic to be a useful umbrella category to encompass all of these types of movies. While pure science fiction extrapolates its "fantastic" elements from technological and scientific principles, pure fantasy needs no such justification, often relying on supernatural or magical justifications for the seemingly impossible. Gothic horror often overlaps with fantasy in that regard with its vampires, witches, and ghosts, for example, but unlike pure

fantasy its main purpose is to be frightening.[1]

To begin, it may be useful to give a thumbnail description of what I mean by devils, zombies and tricksters. Just add a "d" to the word "evil" and you have the essence of the devil (or devils). As with the devil, a trickster is tricky but in a more whimsical way. Unlike the devil, tricksters are usually not outright evil despite their tendency to create havoc. And while zombies also create havoc, they are usually thought of as scary un-dead monsters who travel in ravening hordes to eat people's brains. This essay will consider these figures not *just* as types of characters or creatures *in* fantastic film, but also as apt metaphors for cinema itself. Thus, on a meta-level, I see devils, zombies and tricksters as relating to the tension between the *pro*gressive (hence positive) and the *re*gressive (hence negative) potential of the fantastic in cinema–indeed, as well as *all* cinema in general. Just as there is much overlap and hybridity among science fiction, fantasy, and horror as genres, these three figures likewise share overlapping characteristics that can also be placed along a continuum, thus highlighting some of the tensions between the positive and negative potentials of fantastic cinema.

From the earliest days of cinema, two key conceptions of film emerged that appear to be polar opposites, creating a dichotomy between fantastic and more "realistic" conceptions of cinema. On one end of the spectrum could be found the realist, "slice of life" films such as the Lumière Brothers' *Arrival of a Train in the Station* in 1895 (purportedly the first public projection of a movie), and on the other end of the spectrum formalist or "fantastic" movies such as *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) by Georges Méliès featuring fantastical tales, elaborate sets and costumes, and many of cinema's first special effects. Of course the reality vs. fantasy/fantastic dichotomy that seems to be established by the Lumière Brothers and Méliès so early on, actually proves to be a false dichotomy, since all cinema is in fact a fantasy – a magic trick of technology no matter how "realistic" it may appear to be. As Tom Gunning writes, early filmgoers understood this and considered even early "slice of life" films to be "trick" films (4). Furthermore, as Gunning (1989), Matthew Solomon (2010), Marina Warner (2002, 2006) and others have documented, the technology on which cinema is based has always been intertwined with the supernatural, with questions about reality

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[1] For a further discussion see Fowkes (2010) which includes my characterization of pure fantasy as featuring an "ontological rupture".

and illusion, and the value and limits of the visual. From the beginning, we find a persistent confluence of cinema not just with magic tricks, but also with the wonders of magic as a function of technology (hence a direct link to science-fiction whose fantastic elements are ostensibly rooted in science and technology). And of course magic as a concept in general is associated with the supernatural, further linking cinematic technology to fantasy and gothic horror. Indeed, the magic lantern, a precursor to cinema, was often advertised as a device used to "raise a ghost", thus making this link explicit. So is the magic lantern a technology or a supernatural device?

Méliès, one of the earliest filmmakers, was also a stage magician who not only featured magic tricks in his films, but also explicitly foregrounded the idea of film *as* a magic trick (hence the phrase "trick film" to describe these early short films). Solomon discusses Méliès's film, *The Vanishing Lady* (1896), remarking that the magic is far from just filmed magic tricks or filmed theater, despite the film's very theatrical *mise-en-scène*. Instead, the theatrical setting is merely the "ground from which the figure of the cinematic illusion can emerge" (34). Thus what risked seeming supernaturally "magical" to audiences at the time was actually featured by Méliès as a technological marvel. While traditional magic tricks seek to divert the spectator's attention from the mechanics of the illusion in order for the trick to work, Méliès combined the marvel of traditional magic tricks with the magic of cinema in ways that the viewer could not ignore. Many of the visual effects that Méliès reveled in as technical tricks eventually became embedded in mainstream Hollywood movies as devices to tell what appeared to be more realistic stories. But as Simon During writes: "As far as Méliès was concerned, what would become Hollywood's 'classic' cinema style consisted of magic tricks that did not declare themselves as such" (170).

Through the tricks of film technology, Méliès as a magician positions the filmmaker early on as a kind of trickster, a type of character common to myth, folktales, and fairy-tales around the world, including for example, the ancient Greek demi-God Hermes, the Native American trickster, coyote, and later Brer Rabbit, adapted from African American slave culture and made popular in print by the *Uncle Remus* tales of Joel Chandler Harris (1881). As previously noted, a trickster is tricky, but also usually benign, and comic or whimsical, all characteristics that well describe so many of the whimsical films made by Méliès. In addition, among the many

possible attributes of traditional tricksters is some kind of physical ambiguity and/or the ability to shape-shift or undergo metamorphosis (Hynes 34). Indeed, Méliès (as well as other magicians) delighted in using cinematic techniques to manipulate the physical world being presented, particularly evident in his manipulation of the human body, including his own photographed image, which might, for example, feature his head as impossibly enormous (Solomon 2, During 170).

It should be noted that while Méliès can be seen as a kind of trickster, he also frequently featured magic as connected to devils and imps, an association with a long history related to all kinds of illusions and hallucinations, which were throughout Western history seen to be the work of the devil. In fact both the magic lantern and the *camera obscura* (an optical device which preceded the magic lantern) provide another example of the association of devils with visual illusions, as their depictions in artist renderings frequently showed the devices conjuring up images of the devil (Warner, *Phantasmagoria* 138).

Notably, Méliès, as well as other early filmmakers, frequently drew on the Faust myth, made perhaps most famous by Christopher Marlow in the 1500s, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in the early 1800s, and Thomas Mann in the 1940s. In this persistent and popular story, the ambitious Faust makes a pact with the devil who seduces him with magic and illusion. As Inez Hedges writes: "As visual spectacle, the Faust story was a natural for film" (13). Since the devil had long been associated with illusions and magic, it is no surprise then that Méliès began by featuring himself in films as the human Faust, but soon appeared in subsequent films as the devil himself. Furthermore, in many versions of the myth, in order to acquire knowledge or success, Faust does not just make a pact, he actually makes a bargain *to sell his soul to the devil*. Now, is not it interesting that the pervasive myth (wrongly) attributed to so-called primitive cultures characterizes the camera as a device capable of stealing a person's soul? (Warner, *Phantasmagoria* 189-192). So both the devil and the camera become symbols of soul-stealing, which brings us to zombies.

Most likely the most famous (and canonical) cinematic zombies are featured in George Romero's seminal film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) in which the mutilated undead travel in mindless hordes to attack the living. Zombies are usually thought of as bodily husks; their monstrousness lies, in part, in their lack of "soul". Soul is often equated with spirit, music, and depth, but as Marina Warner writes, the

soul also is often associated with a sense of authenticity and of the individual as being *defined* by his or her soul (*Fantastic Metamorphoses* 39). The soul becomes a symbol of individuality that can transcend the body. But the zombie is then truly damned, because even if the human it once was – *had* – a soul, that soul is not just absent from the zombie, it does not go on to persist in heaven, for example, or anywhere else for that matter. The figure of the devil can thus be seen as a mediating figure in the traditional body/soul dichotomy, which could be represented on the one hand by the soul-less, decaying corpse of the zombie, or the human who in the Faust myth sells his soul (and thus because of the devil becomes *like* a zombie – a body without a soul), and the fluid shape-shifting spirit of many tricksters who can be seen as souls whose bodies can sometimes morph into different shapes or animal forms.

The relationship between shape-shifting and the soul bears some examination. As previously mentioned, Warner discusses the idea that the body is the receptacle of the soul, which leads also to the idea that the soul represents a person's true individuality. However, the soul as individual is thus both ratified by *and* called into question by shape-shifting. It is ratified because in one view the soul can remain intact *despite* shape-shifting. Indeed, in *Metamorphoses*, the eight-century poem by the celebrated Roman poet Ovid, shape-shifting is portrayed as a part of life, a fluidity to be celebrated. But it was eventually called into question over time, because in Judeo-Christian mythology, it came to stand in opposition to what it means to be human, again invoking something devilish and evil. Hence, in Dantes' *Inferno*, it is precisely the lack of stability, coherence and clear categorization that symbolize damnation, in a hell filled with hybrid and mutant beings (*Fantastic Metamorphoses* 35-6).

Interestingly, the earliest filmed versions of the Faust story position Mephistopheles not as an evil to be feared, but instead, as Hedges writes: "the character with whom audiences are invited to identify" (13), hence the fact that Méliès was willing to repeatedly cast himself as the devil. The devil thus "personifies" what Hedges calls "that use of diabolical magic that comes so naturally to cinema" (13), but it is also a type of magic and trickery associated explicitly with rebellion against the status quo (see, for example, Méliès's *Faust et Marguerite* from 1904 and *The Merry Frolics of Satan* from 1906). This positive attitude toward the devil in earliest cinema would soon change as movies became more respectable and

therefore a part of that very status quo. Yet, that more positive attitude nevertheless highlights the continuum between devils and tricksters.

While there are many definitions of what constitutes a trickster, many agree that, like the devil, a trickster uses trickery and deception. But *unlike* most conceptions of the devil he (or it) is rarely evil. As Lewis Hyde writes, "The Devil is an agent of evil, but trickster is *a*moral, not *im*moral. He embodies and enacts that large portion of our experience where good and evil are hopelessly intertwined" (10). While both devils and tricksters may be a cause of fright for certain characters, literary and cinematic tricksters usually create comic havoc, provoking laughter from audiences (Hynes and Doty 7). In many cases, the trickster creates chaos, but in doing so serves a positive function – to question or transform imbalanced power relations, for example, as did early cinematic versions of the rebel, devil-hero.

One function of the trickster is to challenge petrified ideas or situations as found, for example, in the classic film *Harvey* (1950) in which the title character is a trickster who takes the form of a 6 ft. tall invisible rabbit. The film employs the trickster's mischievous pranks to take pretentious characters down a peg, to erase class distinctions, and to create space for a more imaginative and less narrow-minded way of looking at life. It emphasizes the value of imagination, refusing to draw a clear bright line between the possible and the seemingly *im*possible (Fowkes, *The Fantasy Film* 68-80). As Mikail Bakhtin recounts, medieval carnivals provided a ludic space where class and power roles were temporarily inverted, thus linking this rite to the trickster who, as William J. Hynes writes, is often a "situation-invertor" (34). For example, in *Harvey*, the characters try to commit the protagonist, Elwood P. Dowd (Jimmy Stewart), to a mental institution because they believe he is crazy for seeing and talking to a giant invisible rabbit. Yet by the movie's end, the "sane" people are proven to be misguided and Elwood turns out to be one of the sanest characters in the film, thus inverting the dichotomy of sane vs. insane. Furthermore, the rigid authority of the overly rational psychiatrists is completely undermined in favor of a more relaxed and friendly approach to others that relies on friendship and goodwill as opposed to categorization by social class, or a judgment about what is normal or abnormal (Fowkes, *The Fantasy Film* 74).

Another example of a cinematic trickster includes Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice* (1988) in which Michael Keaton plays the title role as a lewd over-the-top trickster

who inadvertently helps the other characters find happiness. In fact, the whole movie operates as a kind of trickster by inverting generic expectations, as the ghost protagonists attempt to exorcise the new (living) owners of their house (hence the living seem to be "haunting" the dead). Furthermore, the living are arguably more ghoulish than the dead and the ghosts are metaphorically filled with more life than the pretentious new owners who care only about money and status and seem "dead" to simple pleasures and honest friendship (Fowkes, "Tim Burton" 238-9). Although Beetlejuice is characterized as being in some state of "undead-ness", and actually looks zombie-like with his dark-rimmed eyes and chalk-white face, here, as in *Harvey*, this trickster-character unwittingly facilitates the spirit of the fantastic itself, namely an appeal to look at the world afresh and to value the imagination, a point made in the movie when most of the characters "can't" see the ghost-protagonists. As *The Handbook for the Recently Deceased* explains to them, the living usually will not see the dead. Only the Goth teenager, Lydia, is able to see them, raising the question of whether the living "can't" or just "won't" see ghosts through a lack of imagination or narrow-mindedness (Fowkes, "Tim Burton" 235-40). The importance of imagination and open-mindedness is related not just to the trickster's function but to what J.R.R. Tolkien called "Recovery", a key benefit of "Faerie" or fantasy stories. Through quality fantasy, a reader (or viewer in this case) can recover a sense of wonder about the world and can be helped to rethink stereotypes and preconceptions (75-87). So if the trickster's job is to overturn stale assumptions and preconceptions through processes of inversion, reversal, chaos and – perhaps most important – through a process of creative imagination and metamorphosis, then the trickster is intimately linked to fantasy as a genre, and to the fantastic in general.

Thus, in imagining a contest between tricksters and zombies, we can see that zombies seem to represent the petrified, mindless (and hence imagination-less) state that the trickster seeks to remedy. Tricksters "animate" stale situations while zombies – although spirit-less and mindless – *are* nevertheless "animated" corpses.

That zombies are animated corpses recalls the fact that cinema essentially works its magic by the animation of still images. Furthermore, we can see the tension between the traditional zombie and trickster as central to cinema itself. As we have seen, it is no accident that Méliès as a filmmaker repeatedly cast himself in his own films as either a trickster-like movie-maker performing cinematic magic tricks, and/or

as the devil, again in both cases performing miraculous illusions through the magic of cinema. But as Hedges and others write, Méliès's focus on causal story-telling helped to spur the formation of the Classical Hollywood film, a type of film with historic and global influence. Furthermore, the desire to better tell the Faust story in particular spurred the invention and exploitation of special effects, effects that would come to be incorporated into *all* kinds of movies, thus also contributing to the creation of narrative conventions that came to be associated with the Classical Hollywood film (Hedges 14). As Hedges writes, "The history of film style is thus inseparable from the Faust story" (42-3). However, this, in tandem with the desire to make movies appropriate for so-called respectable audiences, not only encouraged stories that supported the status quo (thus the devil must be evil, not heroic), but it also codified cinematic conventions and spurred the commodification of cinema as a commercial art form. However, in doing so, the evolution of cinema raised the risk of its own zombification, so to speak.

Thus, a key tension arises. Can fantastic cinema fulfill Tolkien's call to bring to us, in trickster-style, a liberating sense of "recovery" or have we made a Faustian bargain to accept zombification for the privilege of engaging in the cinematic experience? The potential for cinema to steal or kill souls – to zombify – operates on multiple levels – through the mythification of cultural values and norms, including stereotypes of all kinds, through formulaic narrative structures, and through the commodification of the art form.[2] The continuum between magic, devils, tricksters, zombies and cinema itself is relevant to fantasy/sci-fi content, but also provides a way to view the dual-edged nature of these stories. Movies risk zombifying the audience (and hence the culture), and perhaps "tempt" us in devil-like fashion through false utopian promise. But the other side of that coin could be that the trickster-like possibilities in the best stories and movies can re-animate *with* soul. In the best case, their spectacles entrance us, yes, but in a way that elicits wonder, and *not* mindless zombi-ism. Indeed Warner speaks at length of this dilemma, likewise invoking the soul-less zombie as a state of modern alienation untouched by the marvels of our technologies. She refers to what she calls "Ensouling", which requires "an act of self-

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[2] Here it should be noted that for his own part, Méliès resisted the industrialization of movie making, as dramatized not long ago in the film *Hugo* (see also Solomon 58).

consciousness" to reinstate the suppleness of the imagination with a renewed emphasis on fluidity and mutability as guiding metaphors (*Phantasmagoria* 377-9).

To the extent that the conventions of mainstream film themselves also risk becoming zombified (hence a lack of creativity and imagination in cinematic story-telling), we can return once more to the idea of shape-shifting or metamorphosis as the opposite tendency – the ability to change. Shape-shifting and transformation and metamorphosis are also, in fact, common features of fairy tales, which happen to form a central strand of the fantasy genre. Just as the Faust myth seems to have had a major impact on cinematic storytelling, the traditional fairy tale has likewise been hugely influential. It should thus also be noted (big surprise!) that Méliès is responsible for many of the first fairy-tale films, featuring not just shape-shifting, but magic and characters with devilish but usually whimsical trickster-like qualities. For example, Méliès produced a version of *Cinderella* in 1899 featuring the physical transformation of pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, along with the superficial transformation of a young woman in rags into a beautifully dressed woman. In addition, we have the transformation of our protagonist from a degraded scullery maid into a princess by story's end. As Jack Zipes argues, fairy-tales actually provided another key template for the Classical Hollywood film narrative (as defined by David Bordwell and others) *before* that canonical narrative form had evolved in cinema (20). That is, along with the Faust myth, the structure of the fairy tale helped spur the movement away from merely a "cinema of attractions" (to use Gunning's phrase) or "trick" films, towards a cinema built on narrative causality. Specifically, Zipes notes several key elements of mainstream Hollywood cinema that seem to echo the classic fairy-tale template famously offered by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale*: 1) A protagonist is confronted with a prohibition that s/he wishes to violate; 2) This is followed by a subsequent banishment or departure on a journey; 3) The protagonist then faces a task or series of tasks related to the prohibition or original problem. And then of course, there is the resolution of the problem – a return to equilibrium in some ways, but also some type of transformation linked to a happy ending (21). The happy ending of course ties together mainstream Hollywood films (known for happy endings), fairy tales, and fantasy as a genre, particularly as defined by Tolkien's understanding of "Faerie", where "Escape" is not necessarily negative – not an escape from our problems, but an escape into a world that helps in the process

of Recovery.[3] For Tolkien, the happy ending is not, therefore, a cop-out, but essential (a view echoed by Bruno Bettelheim in his work on fairy tales and children). Zipes writes that in fairy tales or traditional "wonder tales," what is at stake is a struggle between those who can or will experience wonder and those who have become tainted in some way. Those characters have been spoiled by "conventionalism, power, or rationalism […] [T]he villains are those who use words and power intentionally to exploit, control, transfix, incarcerate, and destroy for their benefit" (22). If we see the devil as an evil character who tempts other characters to fulfill their own wishes through an appeal to power and control (among other things), we can also see how zombies exhibit "evil-ness" as symbols of the "transfixed", and the "incarcerated". Like other evil characters in fairy tales, zombies "destroy for their own benefit".

If, as Zipes writes, villainous (or devilish characters) in fairy tales wish to "abuse magic by preventing change and causing everything to be transfixed according to their interests" (22), then the trickster has the capacity to disrupt this process, again linking it to the "marvelous protagonist [of fairy tales who] wants to keep the process of natural change flowing" (22). This characterization is highly reminiscent of tricksters who collapse rigid power structures, and who cause what was once static to now be fluid. This again is the fluidity of metamorphosis which is at the heart of so much of myth and magic.

Now zombie movies may be generically pure horror or they may overlap with science fiction in the many cases where the state of zombification is, for example, seen as a kind of infection or virus. But they may also overlap with pure fantasy where they become comic or parodic devices and not purely sources of classic horror. Beginning with George Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*, and the 1979 sequel, *Dawn of the Dead*, which is set in a shopping mall, it is not hard to see zombies as an expression of postmodern alienation in a consumer-driven capitalist environment. It is also not hard to see the connection between a consumer-driven, mediated world that is all surface (simulacrum), and zombies who themselves are all surface. Even their insides are frequently "worn" on the surface as their guts spill out (Talk about wearing your heart on your sleeve – zombies wear their guts on their face…). So as media representations – hence simulacra in a way – zombies are

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[3] Note that while many view "escapism" as an irresponsible neglect of life's difficulties, Tolkien finds a positive potential in escape from legitimate or intractable problems.

simulacra twice over, pressing home the point that in a postmodern era, we risk understanding the world only as an infinite regress, a *mise-en-abyme* of images. As a symbol of mindless consumption (since zombies consume brains), zombies remind us of the way we so often "consume" mainstream movies, funding the media industry through mindlessly watching the spectacles and "escapist" fare that supposedly either amuse us or distract us from our alienation and from the real world problems we face.

Even the parodic and comedic versions of zombies that are so prevalent now, "animate" this conundrum. Is the comic, self-aware zombie itself a kind of trickster and therefore, in my mind, a positive symbol? Or is it just another example of the perils of the postmodern era? Such movies or T.V. shows are highly reflexive, acknowledging the conventions of the zombie movie, and they are often rife with intertextuality. Do the use of humor, persistent reflexivity, and the idea of a speechless and mindless monster evolving into an articulate, self-aware character (as in the T.V. show *Z Nation*) signal a positive metamorphosis? Or, is it just the same old postmodern-inflected, commercialized impulse to capitalize on what is already popular? Thus we have zombie movies and T.V. shows that metaphorically cannibalize other zombie movies, eating their "brains", so to speak.

As we ponder comic zombies, we are returned to the relationship between metamorphosis and hybridity – because in Hollywood films and beyond, generic hybridity is quite common – more common than many film scholars had once acknowledged.[4] So again we have a conundrum: is the hybrid an abomination, as per the hybrid creatures in Dante's *Inferno*, *or* is it a sign of postmodern capitalist cannibalism? Or, returning to Ovid and tricksters – is it, in fact, a sign of creative re-combination and synthesis? Certainly, in many parodic versions, the zombie essentially *becomes* a trickster. No longer scary, the parodic zombie makes fun of its own rigidity and mindless mechanical motions. It is precisely the humor brought by the trickster that helps to "lubricate" rusty ideas or situations and suggests that such dichotomies as progressive vs. regressive, and comic vs. horror (for example) may not themselves be so rigid. As Lewis Hyde writes, "To treat ambivalence with humor is to keep it loose; humor oils the joint where contradictions meet" (274). The use of humor is thus a key device of the trickster. Perhaps zombies have always operated at the border of both horror and the comic. For example, we might invoke Henri

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[4] See, for example, Rick Altman's book, *Film/Genre*. London: BFI, 1999.

Bergson's theory of the body acting like a machine, as Gregory Waller does (306). As Bergson writes, a comedic response may be elicited upon observing, "something mechanical encrusted on the living" (49). Here we have yet another overlap between horror, comedy, and science fiction, where the horrific body of the zombie elicits laughter by resembling an icon of science fiction, namely a robot or automaton.

Waller notes that in *The Dawn of the Dead*, the raiding motorcycle gangs that attack the zombies at the mall take part in a "gleeful", "exuberant" frenzy of violence. He writes: "With its nonstop, bloody mayhem, this sequence resembles an animated cartoon come suddenly to life or even a silent film comedy, particularly when the raiders begin to throw cream pies into the zombies' faces and squirt them with seltzer bottles" (316). Then they go on a parodic shopping spree, loading up on guns and ammunition, looting for looting's sake. It is comic because it is so absurdly over the top and it also makes a pointed connection between zombies and humans, as the human motorcycle gang mimics the voracious behavior of zombies, and zombies seem to mimic crazed shoppers at the mall. In addition, when two survivors, Fran and Peter, escape at the end of the movie, according to Waller, they "are escaping not only from the immediate threat posed by the living dead, but also from the mall and from a life that was itself becoming a sort of living death" (321). Are these zombies really so far from the snobby, status-conscious family that moves into the Maitland's house in *Beetlejuice*?

As many have pointed out, zombies are not so much a threat in isolation as they are in a frenzied horde. Almost by definition, the traditional zombie wields its horrific threat in a group and thus the "mass-ness" of zombies provides a handy analogy for mass media. And unlike vampires, for example, whom you must invite to come into your home, zombies just invade, also a bit like the pervasiveness and invasiveness of so much of our mass media. Furthermore, because, as Waller writes, zombie movies like this make no clear distinctions between legitimate or illegitimate violence, between offensive vs. defensive violence, or between necessary or gratuitous violence (353), I suggest that these parodic zombie movies can operate in trickster-like fashion to call into question the usual categories that govern not just movie conventions but also those conventions as they echo in our actual lives. Here I refer not only to the often false binary categories such as just cited with reference to violence, but also to the binaries that infuse our understanding of what is normal,

what is valuable, as well as our often binary conceptions of media as either being "realistic drama" or "escapist fantasy".

Indeed the goal of this essay has not been so much to answer the question as to whether cinema and, in particular, fantastic cinema is progressive or regressive, but to show that "either/or" is in itself a potentially false or at least overly rigid binary that, in trickster-like fashion, is constantly "animated" by fantastic stories. As I have argued elsewhere, fantastic stories excel in holding up conflicting or competing ideas to scrutiny, while also showing us that sometimes neither or *both* ideas – both "realities" – can be acknowledged (Fowkes, *The Fantasy Film* 9-10).[5] That is, the progressive vs. regressive tension in fantastic cinema probably cannot be resolved. In fact, perhaps it is this very tension that is the whole point. In short, the dichotomy of reality vs. illusion with which I began this essay, as well as so many other dichotomies, are questioned in cinema through technological trickery, tricksters, devils, zombies, fairy tales, and other fantastic elements – all "animated" by the conundrum that is the magic of cinema itself.

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[5] Also see my discussion of *The Wizard of Oz* in this same book, particularly pages 59-67.

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