

ZombieTV

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Channel Surfing Wipeout: Late-Night B Movie Horror Fest

—a green vaporous hand bursts from the bedroom TV
and hovers over the sleeping family in *Poltergeist*—

—“Clear your mind,” advises the midget psychic in Tobe Hooper’s 1982 supernatural thriller *Poltergeist*, “it knows what scares you.” The “it” within this context refers to the malevolent entity which has invaded a quiet suburban home *via* the television and abducted a young child. The “it,” however, also applies to the creative team behind the production of a successful “horror” film such as *Poltergeist*. Bodies are produced to be rended, expended, devoured in a nightmarish parade of violence as the audience munches popcorn, bodies passive, eyes unblinking.

What is “it” that scares the American film-going public? According to George A. Romero’s 1968 cult-classic *Night of the Living Dead* (*NOLD*) and Tobe Hooper’s 1982 *Poltergeist*, “it” is technology run amok and the invasion of the American home. What unites these disparate themes in these two films is the emphasis within each upon the destabilizing presence of the television within the American living room. Home as haven, as refuge from the outside world, is shattered by the invasive force of technoculture, embodied by the glow of the TV in the dark living room of the American household—TV as invasion—

— Television exposes that constitutive outside that you
have to let into the house of being, inundating and
saturating you... (Ronell 311) —

—In both *NOLD* and *Poltergeist*, fear of death is coupled with fear of technology and the locus of supernatural dread is displaced from the graveyard to the living room. In each of these American horror movies, the conduit of supernatural activity is not a ouija board

or other mystical artifact, but a technological innovation—the television—a device that occupies a place of central importance within both cinematic homes. Both Romero and Hooper present pictures of American society in which the privileged position of the television within the living room destabilizes the notion of the home as “a place apart” by constantly providing the cinematic character-viewers with “outside” news and information. In essence, the outside world is a space from which escape is no longer perceived as possible because, via the television, the outside has been invited inside—

—the more local it gets, the more uncanny, not at home, it appears (Ronell 310)—

—The space of the living room thus is exploded by the presence of the TV which dismantles the traditionally perceived public/private boundary of the American living room by allowing outside information (and entities) to invade the space of the home. In each case, this violation of privacy fostered by the technological innovations of the “information age” destabilizes the concept of the home as a comfort zone sheltered from the stress and mayhem of the outside world, ultimately threatening the unity of the American family—

—Moreover, precisely in so far as broadcasting articulates the public and private spheres, it is at the same time a potentially ‘dangerous’ force, in need of regulation; it disrupts or transgresses the boundaries of the family household and its ‘private universe’ (Morley 257).

Feature #1

The grainy, black and white documentary-style *NOLD* opens in a traditional horror movie location—the graveyard—as brother and sister Barbara and Johnny, generic as their names, arrive to place a wreath on their father’s grave.¹ As they exit the car, the radio ominously seems to switch itself on and the announcer explains the prior loss of signal, (the radio’s “deadness”), as the result of “technical problems.” Johnny is surprised by the radio’s intrusion, having assumed it broken. This early instance of technical difficulties provides the first hint that technology has escaped human control and foreshadows the importance that radio

¹ Corrigan suggests that the graininess of the film stock likens it to a home movie (82). Thus, what is revealed by the destabilizing presence of the television and the disintegration of the family in *NOLD* is precisely the

and television news broadcasts will play for the characters within the farmhouse in which Barbara eventually seeks refuge.

The couple's graveside seclusion soon is broken by the intrusion of a third figure in the distance, stumbling among the graves as small American flags wave in the breeze. There is nothing to indicate that the figure approaching them is anything other than another graveyard visitor until the figure unexpectedly attacks Barbara. Johnny intercedes and, as he is thrown to the ground, Barbara flees. Unlike usual horror film conventions, this first appearance of the "undead" is abrupt and undistinguished; the figure approaching from across the graveyard appears in daylight and demonstrates no significantly unusual or "supernatural" characteristics. There is no build in the music or ominous tracking shots of the approaching figure. This first appearance of the undead could easily be misconstrued as an attack by a living, albeit mentally disturbed, person.

Barbara flees from the attack and seeks refuge in the car, only to discover that Johnny has the keys and that she is unable to start the vehicle. She becomes trapped in the automobile—her supposed method of escape—as her undead attacker batters the windows and finally shatters the glass with a rock. In desperation, Barbara releases the emergency brake, and the car rolls down a hill and crashes into a tree. Inability to control specifically transportation technology, as exemplified by Barbara's inability to control the car, is recapitulated again and again throughout *NOLD*: Ben recalls witnessing a truck crash through a guardrail; the pickup truck in which Ben arrives is out of fuel and later explodes killing Tom and Judy; the Cooper family recounts how their car was overturned by the undead and how they had to retreat like Barbara on foot. From the opening moments of the film, technology not only fails its users, but becomes potentially lethal.

Barbara manages to extricate herself from the automobile and flees from her attacker into a secluded farmhouse where technology again fails her—she tries frantically to use the phone only to find it, like the car radio, "dead." Again, she is trapped in a claustrophobic space with no way to communicate her presence to the outside world.

unhomeliness lurking within the home.

² While the scope of this essay precludes an extended analysis of racial conflict in *Night of the Living Dead*, *NOLD* is notable within its Vietnam and Civil Rights-era context for its simultaneous foregrounding and effacement of race. It is Ben, the young, dynamic black man—the only black person, living or dead in the feature—who first comes to Barbara's rescue. As Barbara, who is blond and very pale, lies dazed on a sofa, Ben begins to loosen her garments, constructing the historical nightmare/fantasy of the gentle white woman violated by the feral black man. However, although racial conflicts seem imminent, most especially in the interaction between the selfish and intolerant Harry Cooper and Ben, Mr. Cooper surprisingly forbears from making the expected racial slurs. Indeed, none of the characters make any reference to race. The issue of race—inescapable on the metafictional level—somehow is effaced from the internal consciousness of the film itself. This erasure becomes most evident when watching the sequel, *Dawn of the Dead*, in which racial conflict is explicit during a police raid on a minority community.

The world shrinks to the size of a farmhouse.

Barbara is soon joined within the farmhouse by six other persons seeking refuge from the external mayhem: the intelligent, dynamic, and notably black, Ben,² the ill-fated teenage lovers Tom and Judy, and the Cooper family—Harry, Helen, and their injured daughter Karen. Ben's discovery and utilization of a radio stimulates marital discord between the Coopers as Mrs. Cooper chastises her husband for his decision to remain in the basement, isolated from any source of information—

—In this family [under study] there is a stress on the importance of boundaries and control. Perhaps by way of compensation for his sense of lack of control over the outside world, the man is very concerned to regulate the functions of communications technologies in breaking the boundary between the private and public spheres (Moreley 241)—

—The desire for news from the outside world and the need for authoritative direction force the Coopers to emerge from their basement hiding place to listen to the radio.

What becomes evident, first from radio reports and then from an extended sequence of television news reports and interviews, is that the unburied dead are returning to life and committing acts of murder and cannibalism. As the trapped group gathers around the television in a warped parody of the family, the viewer joins this family, watching as news clips report that the President has called a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and officials from the C.I.A., F.B.I. and N.A.S.A. to discuss the problem. What follows this report is a series of interviews in which, amid attempts to shift blame and cloud the issue, it becomes evident that the “mutations” of the dead are the result of the detonation by N.A.S.A. of a Venus satellite returning to Earth with a “mysterious, high level of radiation.” This revelation confirms the fact that technology has outstripped man's capacity to control it; the “unnatural” return of the dead and the ensuing holocaust of death are revealed to be the direct result of humanity's tampering with the environment and irresponsible use of technology without appropriate safeguards.

The news reports to which the group listen detail an “epidemic of mass murder” that is spreading across the United States. These reports extend the scope and magnitude of the threat from several people trapped in a farmhouse to a large area of the United States—

—**T.V., it**

satellite links

our United States of unconsciousness (Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy [DHOH])—

—While the farmhouse inhabitants cannot communicate their presence and need of assistance to the outside world, reports of the outside world are communicated via the TV, metonymically linking the local predicament to a situation affecting the nation as a whole—

—**What I want to do here is to sketch in some of the ways in which television, as a specific discourse spanning this private/public divide, can be seen to articulate together domestic and national life (Morley 255)—**

—Early reports are only able to identify the assailants as “ordinary looking people” who are part of “a virtual army of unidentified assassins.” And indeed, as life begins to approximate the news reports, an army of ordinary (if sickly) looking “people” is what comes to surround the farmhouse. Just as Barbara is unable to identify her assailant in the graveyard as anything other than a normal human being, the rest of the undead are also more or less (depending upon degree of decomposition) indistinguishable from the living. This confusion becomes most evident in the ironic killing of Ben at the end of the movie, during which Ben is mistaken for one of the undead.

The fears of technology and invasion of the American home expressed within the 1969 *NOLD* arise out of the cultural moment of Vietnam, and the televised news accounts of an “army of unidentified assassins” can be read as a striking metaphor for the Viet Cong. Closely paralleling Vietnam news reports, television in *NOLD* brings gruesome reports of the “war” into the farmhouse living room, polarizing group members as child turns against parent and black man confronts white man—

—**T.V. Is the place where**

**armchair generals and quarterbacks can
experience first hand
the excitement of video warfare (DHOH)—**

—Furthermore, government officials are revealed through the television news broadcasts to be incompetent and untruthful, suggesting another Vietnam parallel.

Toward the end of the film, after the night of terror which only Ben has survived, the action of the film moves outside of the farmhouse into the field, as the camera documents the vigilante mob rooting out and gunning down the living dead. As a roving reporter interviews the sheriff in charge of this “clean-up” operation, the movie itself becomes the news clips earlier reported on the television within the farmhouse; the movie camera becomes the camera filming the interview, providing black-and-white footage comparable to the general in the field indiscriminately eliminating the enemy.

As the story extends beyond the confines of the farmhouse, Romero makes evident that there is little to distinguish the living from the living dead. The members of the sheriff’s posse are as vapid and unemotional as the zombies they mercilessly pick off, one by one. And then Romero provides the ultimate irony: the brave and resourceful hero Ben, the sole survivor of the night of terror within the farmhouse, emerges into the light of day and is gunned down, “another one for the fire.” There is no happy ending here, and there is no place for the courageous and valiant in a society of zombies.

Night of the Living Dead, on many levels, is all about television—about dangerous technology which subverts the “laws of nature,” about the first war to be broadcast into the American living room, about the erasure of the always-already imaginary line separating the internal world of the home from the external world. We first watch characters watching news clips in the farmhouse and then watch directly as those clips are broadcast from the field, ourselves replacing the now-dead characters of the farmhouse. The black-and-white footage in fact reveals that everything is gray—that the living are as much zombies as the dead—and the viewer, rendered passive by the viewing, is ironi-

cally zombified in the process—

—In this peculiar respect, mass communication may be included among the most respectable and efficient social narcotics (Merton and Lazarsfeld, quoted in Morely 252).

Commercial

One of the interesting things that sometimes happens in electronics departments is that cameras are set up to transmit the image of the consumer to the TV screen. Since the camera and the TV cannot be coterminous, the screen image can never be a mirror reflection—to see one's image on the screen is always to see oneself from an impossible perspective—from above, from the side, even from behind. The effect is uncanny—seeing oneself suddenly through the eyes of another without the possibility of establishing eye contact. More so than a photograph or a videotape, the immediacy of the encounter establishes a hypnotic objectification of the self as other. The uncanniness is heightened by a certain vertigo induced through trying to move one's body for the camera while looking at the screen. Moving for the camera, in essence, one attempts to occupy two spaces at once. Moving for the camera, watching oneself on the screen, one suddenly feels foolish, exposed to the invisible gazes of others. The encounter with the resistant doppelganger is a moment of crisis, of seeing oneself *not seeing*, and of knowing that one can be seen *not seeing*. How can one regain control of one's image? By purchasing the camera of course, and filming others.

Short Subject

Dawn of the Dead, the 1978 sequel to *Night of the Living Dead*, moves the action from in front of a farmhouse TV to a TV station. The movie opens *in medias res*, amid panic at a TV studio. The living dead have overrun Philadelphia and the station is struggling to stay on the air. From *Night* to *Dawn*, the viewer follows the transmission process from the televised footage received by the TV, to the recording of that footage in the field, to the studio—the point of transmission itself. The debate in the studio centers around the ethics of continued transmission—should the studio continue to send out reporters who will be killed? The

³ As in *Night of the Living Dead*, in *Dawn*, a masculine-active/female passive binary opposition is established. Fran, much like Barbara, remains distant from the mayhem. Indeed, Fran, who early on refuses to play homemaker, ends up doing exactly that, remaining in the hideout and nursing the injured Roger. During the course of the movie, the viewer learns that Fran is pregnant. This fact, juxtaposed with her escape from the mall with the black character Peter, suggests an interesting interracial redefinition of the family.

station boss says yes, his assistant Fran (one of the four who ultimately will escape from Philadelphia), objects.³

From the opening credits, television, capitalism, and zombies are conjoined. Coverage of disaster translates into ratings which translate into cash. Although the studio debate about whether or not to continue coverage of the disaster focuses primarily on the safety of the reporters and studio crew, the ethics of televised horror is also implicitly raised, ironically interrogating *Dawn of the Dead* and the horror genre itself. Ronell encapsulates the debate surrounding media violence when she asks, "When [American scenes of violence] pass into the media and graduate into 'events' are these scenes already *effects* of the media?" (309)—

—T.V., is it the reflector or the director?

Does it imitate us
or do we imitate it

Because a child watches 1500 murders before he's
twelve years old and we wonder how we've created
a Jason generation that learns to laugh
rather than abhor the horror (DHOH)—

—Whereas the farmhouse in *Night of the Living Dead* functions as a nexus of race, class, and gender conflicts, *Dawn of the Dead* moves the action from rural farmhouse to shopping mall, locating the conflict firmly within the American middle class. Zombie consumption of flesh is paralleled with living consumption of goods in consumer culture. Indeed, Romero's playful sequence of zombies roaming the mall to muzak is juxtaposed with an extended sequence, (reminiscent of DeLillo's *White Noise*), in which the characters Peter and Roger exclaim enthusiastically, "Let's go shopping!", and then joyously proceed to gather consumer goods like children in the proverbial candystore. They return, excited and out of breath, exclaiming, "You should see all the great stuff we've got—this place is terrific!"

In *Night of the Living Dead*, characters seek refuge in a farmhouse—and the farmhouse is revealed as penetrable, insecure. In *Dawn of the Dead*, television newscasts reveal that a state of martial law has been imposed and that the Federal Government has decreed that it is unsafe for individuals to occupy private residences. Someplace homier than

home must be sought, and the mall is discovered to be this site of comfort and security. In response to the query about why the living dead have congregated at the mall, Roger replies, "Instinct, memory, what they used to do—this was an important place in their lives." Later he adds, "They remember they want to be here." Consumer culture animates both living and dead and renders the distinction uncertain—

—You saw the video

You heard the soundtrack

Well now go buy the softdrink (DHOH)—⁴

Feature #2

For most people there are only two places in the world—where they live and their TV set (DeLillo 66)—

—As in *NOLD*, the television within *Poltergeist* also occupies a place of central importance within the American living room. However, within *Poltergeist*, the television not only symbolically dismantles the inside/outside bipolarity but serves as a literal conduit between worlds as well. The film opens with the flashing, disconnected images of a television screen viewed from very close up. As the camera pulls back, the grainy dots resolve, Seurat-like, into a series of patriotic images as scheduled programming draws to a conclusion. The National Anthem ends, and the color TV images are replaced by black-and-white static. The recurring juxtaposition of the television screen and the image of the American flag, in light of the television's subsequent invasive function, expresses an ominous sense of distrust towards the government and its alliance with modern technology, a distrust manifested in *NOLD* through N.A.S.A.'s responsibility for the undead. While distrust for the government is only implied in *Poltergeist*, it is obvious that authority structures, while not necessarily malevolent in intent, are, however, insufficient to protect the American citizen; the middle-class family involved in the hauntings at no point resorts to traditional authority structures, such as the police, for protection or to make sense of the bizarre phenomena—

—X-Files: After several murders, Mulder and Sculley uncover a plot to control minds via television broadcasts.

⁴ As in *Night of the living Dead*, where the viewer moves from being situated with the characters in front of the TV to being actually behind the camera filming interviews, life approximates TV in *Dawn of the Dead* as well—all action flows outward from the TV studio. As the movie opens, two events occur: studio crew debate the ethics of continued coverage of the catastrophe, while a vigorous televised debate between a white scientist and a black commentator airs from the studio. Reports of living dead and volatile race relations are both subsequently instantiated in the movement from the TV studio to a police standoff.

The standoff sequence, eerily proleptic of the 1985 Philadelphia police assault on the MOVE rowhouse in West Philadelphia, introduces explicit racial conflict into *Dawn of the Dead*, conflict absent as noted above from *NOLD*. In this scene, the Philadelphia

police, for reasons that remain unexplained by the movie, surround a hotel and attempt to force out the occupants. Whereas the intolerant Mr. Cooper in *Night of the Living Dead* refrains from racial slurs, the intolerant Philadelphia officer Willie foregrounds racial tension as he identifies the inhabitants of the building as blacks and Hispanics, and confesses his desire to “blow all their low-life little Puerto Rican and nigger asses right off.”

As is usual for the series, the government is suspected of using the American public as guinea pigs for insidious experimentation—

**—One Nation
under God
has turned into
One Nation under the influence
of one drug
Television, the drug of the Nation
Breeding ignorance and feeding radiation
(DHOH)—**

—amid static buzz and the lightning-like flashing of the screen across the living room walls, little Carol Anne, age 5, is summoned to the television. She crouches down close to the screen and engages in an *interactive* dialogue with the set, as her father slumbers in the recliner. While the queries put to her by the television are inaudible to the audience, her responses are quite plainly audible and, as she complains that she cannot see to whom she is speaking and that she is having difficulty hearing, her family gathers around her and observes the exchange. Ultimately, Carol Anne places her hands upon the TV screen, as if upon a window, and answers the questions she seemingly is asked.

The image of little Carol Anne in silhouette, lit by the glow of the television in front of her, is the familiar publicity poster and video box cover for the movie. The viewer sees Carol Anne from behind, watches her interact with the television which assumes the prominent position in the image. The intriguing aspect of this scene is that the television here no longer serves as a one-way funnel of information into the home, but now functions in the exact opposite capacity; the family, with the exception of Carol Anne, can neither see nor hear anything on the television apart from the normal “snow” and static expected from a channel that is no longer carrying a signal. However, some foreign entity at the other end of the transmission process or at some point in between is gathering information about the American family *through* the living room television set. The TV is now functioning like a camera, allowing an outside entity to observe, through the TV, the family that

normally does the watching. The intended technological function of the television has been subverted by the mysterious supernatural third party.

Within *NOLD*, the television performs its “normal” function of providing information to the observers, in the process metaphorically inviting the outside world into the



© MGM/Archive Photos

living room. Within *Poltergeist*, the television actually serves as a portal through which another world, the supernatural world, can gain access to the American living-room. As the family lies sleeping together in the bedroom during a thunderstorm, the still-operative TV, echoing the movie’s opening sequence, plays the National Anthem and the transmitted signal again goes “dead,” leaving “snow” and static. It is from this flickering buzz of the television that a green vapor emerges and shoots into the wall above the bed, shaking the house and waking the family in the process. Following this occurrence, Carol Anne utters her now-famous observation, “They’re here.” In response to her mother’s query, “Who’s here?” Carol Anne responds, “The TV people” —

—“Mike!” screamed Mrs. Teavee, clasping her head in her hands. “Where are you?”

“I’ll tell you where he is,” said Mr. Teavee, “he’s whizzing around above our heads in a million tiny pieces!”

...“We must watch the television set,” said Mr. Wonka. “He may come through at any moment” (Dahl 140)—

—From start to finish, *Poltergeist*

is a movie based around the presence of the television within the American living room. The opening sequence pulls back to reveal a TV, it is through the TV that supernatural forces gain entrance to the household, it is through the TV that the mother can communicate with her daughter,⁵ it is with video cameras, televisions, and advanced electronic equipment that “paranormal researchers” investigate the supernatural goings-on, (in another case of life approximating TV, the supernatural phenomena ambiguously observed is rendered distinct only by watching the playback of the video), and, in the climax of the film, it is through a portal in the children’s closet, whose flashing light and deafening buzz approximate an enlarged version of the living-room television flickering in the dark room, that the mother disappears after her daughter. In a comic gesture, the last scene of the movie observes the beleaguered family expelling a television from the depersonalized space of their highway motel room and the camera lingers on the television as the screen fades to black. Thus, closure is attained—opening image and closing image are unified by a focus upon the television screen. (Since the family now needs to discover someplace more homey than their home, perhaps their next stop will be the mall...)

⁵ The main dynamic of *Poltergeist* is a mother-daughter relationship. It is the mother who ventures into the limbo-space to retrieve her abandoned daughter. *Poltergeist* thus constitutes a complete reversal from *Night of the Living Dead*—in the former, a mother rescues her daughter, in the latter a daughter murders (and devours!) her mother.

MTV

We have channel-surfed through monster movie features, prime time, commercials, news programs, and the children’s station in order to indicate the ways in which television in American culture functions as a locus of fear, as an uncanny presence that undermines one’s sense of security. I will now conclude by addressing two images: the front and back cover of the band Marilyn Manson’s 1994 release *Portrait of an American Family*. These two images together nicely encapsulate much of the preceding discussion.

The front cover of *Portrait* (Figure 1) creates a disturbing impression of the American family. Surrealistically illuminated by one hanging lightbulb, the scene features

four crude papier mache figures—a mother, a father, and two sons—all seated facing the viewer. Surrounded by cheap wood paneling, the mother and father sit in an old loveseat, while the two children sprawl on a red carpet. The family is white trash—the tattooed father sits in a dirty undershirt with a beer in his hand and a cigarette in his mouth. His prominent belt buckle reads “nobody ever raped” with a

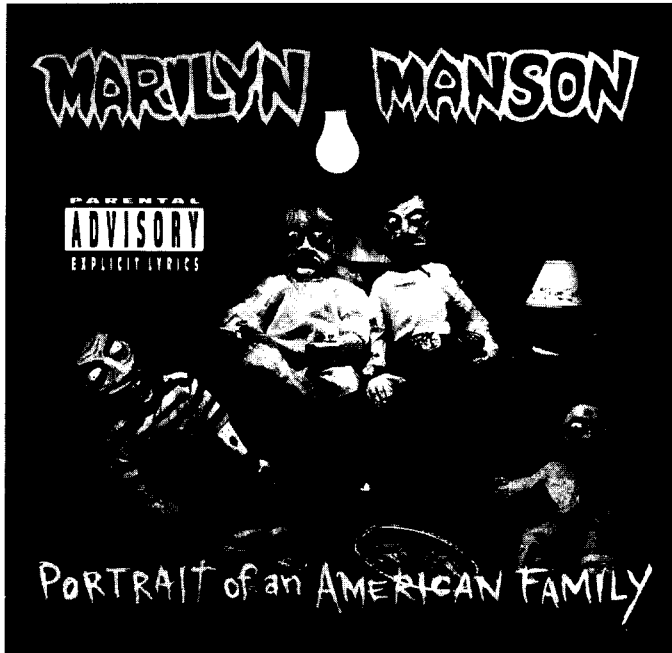


Figure 1, ©Nothing/
Interscope

gun pointed at the reader. His pregnant wife sits next to him, cigarette in hand. The youngest child lies naked on the floor, except for socks. A tin of french fries also sits on the red carpet. All the figures feature bulging white eyes and misshapen features. The mother and father sit expressionless, while the older son leers crazily. Each son features an evident wound—the older one on his arm, the younger on his head.

What is missing from this frightening depiction of the white-trash American family is, of course, the television. However, the orientation of the sofa, the fixed gazes of the family, their bulging eyes and zombified stares make evident that the television is missing from the scene be-

cause the viewer is occupying the place of the television, voyeuristically spying on this family through the television. We are now the disembodied entity on the other side of the screen looking with horror at what the typical American family has become.

And who are we? The back cover (Figure 2) makes clear that we are Marilyn Manson and Marilyn Manson is television. The back cover features a sitting naked man, pale, gaunt, and bathed in shadowy green light, arms outspread in front simultaneously to block the view of his genitals and to display the elaborate tattoos running up and down the arms and converging in eyes at the crux of each inner arm. But the feature of the image that immediately grabs the viewer's attention is the television with an enlarged image of a face in place of where the head of the figure should be. The figure is a nightmarish hybrid of human form and technology. From within the television, Marilyn Manson stares out maniacally, eyes leering, mouth

Figure 2, ©Nothing/
Interscope



gaping, with pierced lip and decaying teeth.

The inside compact disc packaging reads down the left side "I am you." And, after the credits, Marilyn elaborates on this conflation:

You spoonfed us Saturday morning mouthfuls of maggots and lies disguised in your sugary break-

fast cereals. The plates you made us clean were filled with your fears. These things have hardened in our soft pink bellies. We are what you have made us. We have grown up watching your television. We are a symptom of your Christian America, the biggest satan of all. This is your world in which we grow. And we will grow to hate you.

The “I am you” designation works in two directions. Marilyn claims to be what “we”—corporate, Christian America—have produced. Marilyn as hatred, Marilyn as freak, is symptomatic of an intolerant, hypocritical, and Puritanical culture. On the other hand, “we” are Marilyn—beneath dark suits, power ties, and pious exteriors, lurk the same perversity, hatred, and freakishness that Marilyn incarnates. And the way these characteristics are inculcated in the American family is through consumer culture with television being its premier medium of imperialism. Thus, Marilyn as zombie TV presents television’s true face of capitalist hegemony—

**—T.V. is mechanized politic’s
remote control over the masses
co-sponsored by environmentally safe gases
watch for the PBS special (DHOH)—**

ZombieTV—Don’t Touch that Dial!

The death of God may have left us with a lot of appliances, but in horror and certain strands of popular discourse, the appliance begins to assume the vacant place of the Almighty, and humanity’s apparent difficulty pulling the plug functions as a source of contemporary anxiety. Both *NOLD* and *Poltergeist*, through the omnipresent insistence of the television, manifest an extreme form of “techno-paranoia.” The notions that technology can be appropriated and utilized in unintended and dangerous ways and that technology can undermine the privacy and security of the home undergird the premises of both movies. It is only once the television is expelled in *Poltergeist* that a sense of security is reestablished.

However, while the family within *Poltergeist* escapes relatively unscathed, the house itself does not survive. During the (perhaps) unexpected and sexually-charged sec-

ond climax of the movie, the exploded space of the living room violently contracts and the house, quite literally, implodes. The presence of the television within the living room has compromised the structural integrity of the house and the weight of the outside world crushes the structure.

What is revealed when the house begins its implosion is that the home is situated atop a graveyard. Whereas *NOLD* opens in a graveyard which yields up its dead and ends in a home which becomes a locus of death, in *Poltergeist*, the home and the graveyard are geographically juxtaposed. Maximal proximity is achieved between the living and the dead as home and graveyard are equated and the porous barrier separating the living from the dead, delineating the natural and the “unnatural,” manifests itself in the form of a television screen—

—...one of the key functions of broadcasting is the creation of a bridge between the public and the private, the sacred and the profane, the extraordinary and the mundane (Morely 283)—

—Just as *Dawn of the Dead* suggests a critique of capitalist consumer culture via the conflation of zombie and shopper, *Poltergeist* suggests a similar critique through identifying greed as the moving force behind the supernatural occurrences. Marilyn Manson’s white trash family, TV head, and vitriolic diatribe condense these themes into a forceful articulation of techno-paranoia in which television functions as an invasive, imperialist force which colonizes/stupifies the viewer—

—...no matter what’s on, I daresay, it is emptied of any signified; it is a site of evacuation, the hemorrhaging of meaning, ever disrupting its semantic fields and the phenomenal activities of showing...(Ronell 311)—

—In Romero’s *Living Dead* movies, technology gone awry animates the dead, and in *Poltergeist*, the presence of the TV in the living room threatens the American family. Marilyn Manson, however, as monstrous hybrid of human and television who speaks on behalf of the “TV generation,” suggests that not only does the television compromise the integrity of the home as haven from the outside world, but that this invasion zombifies the viewer. *NOLD* and *Poltergeist* manifest anxi-

ety about turning on the TV, Marilyn Manson asks rather if it is still possible to turn it off.

**—2, 7, 5, 4, 8 she watched she said
All added up to zero
And nothing in her head (Public Enemy)—**

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