

Night of the Living Film: A Preservation History and Examination of George A. Romero's *The
Amusement Park*

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Abstract

In 1973, George A. Romero was approached by the Lutheran Service Society of Western Pennsylvania to create an educational film about elder abuse. That film, *The Amusement Park*, was soon shelved by the Service Society after a few screenings in 1975 and was eventually assumed to have been lost. However, nearly forty years later, a 16mm print was sent to Romero by the Torino Film Festival, which had screened it as part of a retrospective on Romero in 2001. Although he would not live to see it, the film was restored in 2021 by the nonprofit organization IndieCollect, and distributed that same year by the streaming service Shudder. This thesis considers multiple aspects of *The Amusement Park*, with the aim to answer three interrelated questions: How was the film lost and then subsequently “found”? Where does the film fit within Romero’s larger body of work? To what degree are sponsored, educational, and industrial films now considered worthy of preservation?

This paper will be divided into five sections. The first will detail the backstory of *The Amusement Park*, including its creation and eventual disappearance. The second section will cover the “rediscovery” and restoration of the film. The third will examine how the film fits in Romero’s larger body of work as a director, particularly as a transitional work between his better-known features *The Crazies* (1973) and *Martin* (1978). After that, I will examine how industrial films like *The Amusement Park* are still capable of having strong artistic merit, by comparing the more experimental aspects of the film to the works of Herk Harvey, Edgar G. Ulmer, and the production company On Film Inc. Finally, I’ll argue that *The Amusement Park*, while not a major feature in Romero’s oeuvre, is still important both as a transitional work between *The Crazies* and *Martin*, as well as an example of artistic merit being found in industrial films.

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Introduction, or, “Bing Bang Boom”

Sometime towards the start of 2017, Suzanne Desrocher-Romero, the then-wife of horror film icon George A. Romero, received an unexpected package from Italy. It was sent by their friend Giulia D’Agnolo Vallan, programmer and curator for the Torino Film Festival, and contained a 16mm print and DVD of a film the festival screened during a retrospective on Romero’s career in 2001.¹ It was called *The Amusement Park* and what surprised Suzanne the most about it was that, in the more than ten years they had known each other, George had never mentioned it. She asked him what the film was and, according to an interview Suzanne did several years later, he glibly replied, “Well, you know, it was a little something I did in ’73.”² Eventually, in late June 2017 (about three weeks before George’s passing due to lung cancer), they watched the DVD copy together. “I was gobsmacked,” she recalled in a separate interview, “It’s...hard to describe. It’s so unique, it’s edgy, it’s still relevant. It still has Romero all over it.”³ When it was over, she asked George why he had never mentioned the, as she put it, “disturbing, ugly film.”⁴ “Suze,” he replied, “it was three days. It was bing, bang, boom. We shot it, it was nothing, it was a commission.”⁵

In the five years since the film was “rediscovered,” it has been restored and re-released under Desrocher-Romero’s guidance, and is (at the time of writing) available to rent or purchase from Amazon Prime and iTunes, as well as available on Blu-ray. Because the film has only very recently been made available to the public, relatively little has been written on the film, its

¹ Crump, Andrew. “How George Romero's Amusement Park Was Brought to Life 48 Years Later.” *Consequence*, June 3, 2021. <https://consequence.net/2021/06/george-romero-the-amusement-park-interviews/>.

² Cheryl Eddy, *io9* (G/O Media, June 3, 2021), <https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2021/06/george-a-romeros-wife-suzanne-on-his-horror-legacy-and-lost-film-the-amusement-park/>.

³ Don Kaye, “The Amusement Park: How George Romero's Long Lost Film Was Found,” *Den of Geek*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/the-amusement-park-george-romero-lost-film-found/>.

⁴ *Re-Opening The "Park" with Suzanne Desrocher-Romero*. USA: Red Shirt Pictures, 2022.

⁵ Kaye

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qualities, and its history. Outside of news articles covering the film's restoration, as well as reviews of the movie once it came out, little information on the film can be found. This even extends to critical and scholarly sources. Paul Gagne's 1987 book *The Zombies That Ate Pittsburgh: The Films of George A. Romero*, one of the earliest extensive biographies on Romero, only devotes a run-on sentence to the film and only in relation to how its lead, Lincoln Maazel, later appeared in the more well-known film *Martin*.⁶ The most recent book on Romero's work, the second edition of Tony Williams' *Knight of the Living Dead: The Cinema of George A. Romero*, devotes only a few pages to the film in the appendix. Since it was written in 2015, when the film was still considered lost, Williams relies on a review he wrote from a 1983 screening for information on the film.⁷

Thus, the purpose of this paper: to uncover the lost history of the making of *The Amusement Park*, discuss how the film was preserved and restored, and examine how the film fits within both the filmography of Romero as well as in the context of other industrial films of the era. This research paper will cover multiple aspects of *The Amusement Park*, in order to answer three interrelated questions:

- How was the film lost and then subsequently "found"?
- Where does the film fit within Romero's larger body of work?
- To what degree are sponsored or industrial films considered to have artistic merit?

This thesis will therefore be divided into five sections. The first details the backstory of *The Amusement Park*, including its creation, limited reception, and eventual disappearance. The

⁶ The sentence, in full: "Lincoln Maazel (Cuda), father of noted conductor Loren Maazel, had previously appeared in a short film Romero made in 1975 for the Lutheran Services Society, *The Amusement Park*, which was a highly stylized dramatization of the problems of old age."

⁷ Williams, Tony. *The Cinema of George A. Romero: Knight of the Living Dead*. 2nd ed., Columbia University Press, 2015.

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second section discusses the “rediscovery” and restoration of the film, including technical and copyright issues. The film’s status as an orphan work will also be examined in this section. The third section discusses how the film fits in Romero’s body of work, particularly as a transitional work between his feature films *The Crazies* (1973) and *Martin* (1978). I emphasize how *The Amusement Park* is more experimental than *The Crazies*, at least in presentation and structure, and how that experimental style continued over (in a more subdued form) into *Martin*.

The fourth section will examine how industrial films like *The Amusement Park* are still capable of having strong artistic merit by comparing the more experimental aspects of the film to the works of Herk Harvey (an earlier filmmaker who, with one notable exception, worked almost exclusively in industrial films and had an influence on Romero), Edgar G. Ulmer and the production company On Film Inc, with particular attention being given to the film *Pittsburgh* (1958).

The final section is a summary and conclusion, with the concluding idea being that *The Amusement Park*, while not a major feature in Romero’s oeuvre, is still important both as a transitional work between *The Crazies* and *Martin*, as well as an example of artistic merit being found in industrial films. I will also discuss the preservation status of similar industrial films.

Part 1: “A Disturbing, Ugly Film”

Some backstory is necessary in order to explain how and why Romero made *The Amusement Park*. Because so much has already been written about Romero’s career before and during the creation of *Night of the Living Dead* (1969),⁸ it shall only be covered briefly in this

⁸ *The Zombies that Ate Pittsburgh* is an excellent source of information on Romero’s career up till *Day of the Dead* (1985).

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section. Born in New York in 1940, Romero was interested in filmmaking from a young age, making short 8mm films at his uncle's house in Scarsdale. In his late teens, he said he became disillusioned with Hollywood as a system, after two negative experiences working as a gofer there. After graduating from Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University in 1962, he and some friends founded Latent Image Films, and began to produce an anthology film entitled *Expostulations* (a work which is most likely lost to history, since according to the George A. Romero Foundation the only known print of that and several other pre-*Night of the Living Dead* Latent Image films were lost in a 1973 flood).⁹ When production of the movie eventually fell through, Romero and co. founded Latent Image Productions the following year and began to work out of a rundown storefront. "We used to literally chip the ice out of the toilet so we could flush it," George later said.¹⁰ They had nothing but a 16mm Bolex camera, some lights, and six months' worth of rent.

Rather than work on another feature, Latent Image focused on smaller projects around Western Pennsylvania. These included advertisements for the local Buhl Planetarium (their first commercial), commercials for major Pittsburgh companies Heinz, Alcoa, and U.S. Steel, as well as several segments for *Mister Rogers Neighborhood* (Romero has joked that the scariest thing he ever made was a segment on Fred Rogers tonsillectomy).¹¹ It wasn't easy work, and they were often only barely able to scrape by. As frequent Romero collaborator John Russo said, "Most of the time we were broke, frustrated, and physically and mentally exhausted."¹² Romero attributed this lack of early success to the fact that Pittsburgh was not an artistically inclined city.

⁹ <https://twitter.com/thegarfofficial/status/1270721641698299904>

¹⁰ Gagne, 10.

¹¹ Conradt, Stacy. "When Mr. Rogers Gave George Romero His First Paying Gig." Mental Floss, May 23, 2016. <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/80353/when-mr-rogers-gave-george-romero-his-first-paying-gig>.

¹² Gagne, 19

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“Pittsburgh money feels safe investing in iron foundries. You tell them you want to make a film, they want to beat you over the head and put you in a straitjacket.”¹³ Eventually, after securing a few lucky advertising deals,¹⁴ and a string of well-received commercials (Russo later recalled that “...by 1967, we had walls covered with awards for our commercial work”),¹⁵ Latent Image managed to scrounge up enough cash to buy their first 35mm camera and, in 1967, began work on their first feature: a horror movie entitled *Night of the Flesh Eaters*, based on a short story Romero had written titled “Anubis.” Fearing that the title was too similar to Dan Curtis’ 1964 film *The Flesh Eaters*, the title was changed to *Night of Anubis*. That title actually remained unchanged well into production. A workprint version of the film under that title is in the 2018 Criterion release of the film. But Walter Reade Productions, the company that agreed to help distribute the film, wanted a more eye-catching title, so Romero changed it to *Night of the Living Dead*.

However, Romero and the rest of Latent Image Productions were barely able to capitalize on their newfound success. Due to a mistake in filing copyright on the film, they were unable to gain much revenue from the film’s new release. A protracted legal battle with Walter Reade Productions over the rights to the movie ended when Walter Reade went bankrupt in 1978, and Romero and company got no money out of the lawsuit.

This was followed by further bad luck for Latent Image, as they released a string of three movies that mostly failed to gain any critical or commercial attention: *There’s Always Vanilla* (a.k.a *The Affair*¹⁶) (1971), *Season of the Witch* (a.k.a *Hungry Wives* and *Jack’s Wife*) (1973), and *The Crazies* (a.k.a. *Codename: Trixie*) (1973). The alternate titles are from attempts to re-

¹³ Gagne, 20

¹⁴ Personal favorite being *The Calgon Story*, a delightfully tongue-in-cheek riff on *Fantastic Voyage*.

¹⁵ *Learning from Scratch* (The Criterion Collection, 2017).

¹⁶ Williams, 38

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release the films years later. *There's Always Vanilla* is generally regarded by both critics and Romero himself to be an artistic low point for the people involved. Based on a short film Romero's friend Rudy Ricci made immediately after *Night of the Living Dead*, this rom com follows a former army soldier named Chris as he returns home to his native Pittsburgh. Ricci advised against expanding the film, saying that it would just make it "an elongated Pepsi commercial."¹⁷ The film had a messy development as Romero tried to avoid being pigeonholed as a horror director and make a Hollywood style rom com in the same vein as *The Graduate* (1967) and *Goodbye, Columbus* (1969). The result was an unfocused, boring dud that failed to make an impression with critics or at the box office.¹⁸ Most of the original staff of Latent Image left the company after production had ended, many on bad terms with Romero (these relationships healed with time, and had become amicable again by the time Gagne wrote *The Zombies That Ate Pittsburgh*).¹⁹ *There's Always Vanilla* was only released on home video in 2005 as a bonus to *Season of the Witch*. A Blu-ray release followed from Arrow Video in 2018.

Season of the Witch did not fare much better, although this was due less to the quality of the film itself than to the circumstances that surrounded its distribution. Still dealing with the collapse of Latent Image and the financial difficulties therein, Romero made a psychological drama influenced by the then-growing feminist movement. However, the film's distributor Jack Harris (most famous for producing *The Blob* in 1958), was unhappy with the final product and recut the film from its original 130-minute runtime to a meager 89 minutes, marketing it as a softcore film.²⁰ This too failed to leave any impression on critics or audiences (To quote Vincent Canby in his 1980 NYT review of the film, it "...has the seedy look of a porn film but without

¹⁷ Williams, 34

¹⁸ Gagne, 45

¹⁹ Gagne, 46

²⁰ Williams, 58

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any pornographic action. Everything in it, from the actors to the props, looks borrowed and badly used”),²¹ although critics have been retrospectively kinder to it if only for what it could have been since the missing scenes have, for the most part, been lost. The longest version, also released by Arrow Films in 2018, runs 104 minutes. According to Gagne, Romero also had a soft spot for the film and had said that if he had to remake any of his movies, it would have been that one.²²

Out of the three features Romero made post-*Night of the Living Dead*, *The Crazies* is the one that has fared the best, albeit entirely in retrospect. With two financial failures under his belt, a company that was slowly crumbling, and shouldering mountains of debt, Romero decided to return to the horror genre. He and producer Al Croft returned to Cambist Films, which had distributed *There's Always Vanilla*, to help finance the project. The details regarding the film's content and filmic qualities (especially in comparison with *The Amusement Park* and *Martin*) will be discussed in greater detail in the third section. For now, though, it's important to note that, while it fared slightly better critically than his previous two films (and would slowly gain a cult following through home video, even getting a moderately successful remake in 2010), a lackluster marketing campaign meant the film bombed on initial release. This left Latent Image on the verge of collapse and Romero, with over \$500,000 in debt, unsure of what (if any) future he had in feature films.²³

From here, the timeline starts to get fuzzy. In between the release of *The Crazies* in 1973 and *Martin* in 1977, Romero scaled back the scope of the projects he was working on, focusing mostly on smaller works like advertisements and short films. In May of 1973, after production of

²¹ Vincent Canby, “Hungry Wives,” *New York Times*, (December 12, 1980): T8.

²² Gagne, 49

²³ Gagne, 55

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The Crazies wrapped, Romero joined with producer Richard P. Rubinstein to found Laurel Entertainment from the remnants of Latent Image. Rubinstein would bring to the table something that neither George nor any of his compatriots had experience in: the business side of filmmaking. Rubinstein was able to use his experience in business to take off some of the debt pressure Romero was facing (though not all of it – Romero said he wouldn't finish paying off the debts he incurred making *Season of the Witch* until 1980).²⁴

Rubenstein also used his connections to the television industry to get Laurel its first job as a company: producing a series of sports documentaries for the ABC network. This series, titled “The Winners”, consisted of thirteen 45-minute shorts each focusing on a different sports icon. George directed eight episodes, Richard Rubinstein did one, and the other four were directed by Michael Gornick, a relative newcomer to Latent Image/Laurel Pictures, and who would go on to be Director of Photography for all of Romero's films between *Martin* and *Day of the Dead*. The most noteworthy of these shorts, for good or for ill, was a television special George directed on an up-and-coming football player named Orenthal James Simpson. The episode, titled “O.J. Simpson: Juice on the Loose,” was given some press coverage when it first premiered in December 1974, mostly in African American Newspapers like the New York Amsterdam News²⁵ and the Chicago Defender,²⁶ with some coverage in Pittsburgh that was mostly focused on Romero.²⁷ Due to Simpson's murder trial in 1994, it is also one (if not the only) episode given its own home video release, with Vidmark releasing a VHS copy of the

²⁴ Gagne, 49

²⁵ John L Procope, ed., “Profile Of O.J. Simpson On ABC-TV,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 21, 1974, sec. D, p. 21.

²⁶ Norman O Unger, ed., “‘Juice’ on the Loose Will Be Aired Soon,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 21, 1974, Weekend edition, sec. Sports, p. 21.

²⁷ Anderson, George. “The Latent Image Has Not Faded.” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 19, 1974.

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special in August of 1994.²⁸ Due to its home video release, “Juice on the Loose” is also the easiest to find, with rips of the VHS being available on both YouTube and Archive.com

Rubinstein would go on to produce all of Romero’s feature-length films from *Martin* until *Day of the Dead*. He still holds the rights to *Martin* and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), which has caused the films to not be out of print in the US due to Rubinstein’s refusal to allow the movies to be released on DVD until he converts it into 3D. These copyright issues are a common problem with Romero films and, as will be discussed later, *The Amusement Park* is no exception.

Regardless, at some point in 1973, The Lutheran Service Society of Western Pennsylvania contacted Romero with a proposal to create a short film.

A brief primer on terminology regarding the many Lutheran denominations at the time (as well as their media departments) is necessary in order to avoid confusion. The Lutheran Service Society of Western Pennsylvania was (and still is) a nonprofit organization set up by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, which in turn was a part of the Lutheran Church in America (hereafter referred to as the LCA). A synod, in this context, functions similarly to a diocese in Anglican and Catholic churches. What complicates matters, however, is that the LCA no longer exists – in 1988, it (along with the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod) merged with several other denominations to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA),²⁹ which it remains a part of. Mergers such as these were not uncommon in the history of American Lutheranism – from the late 19th until the late 20th century, there were dozens of Lutheran denominations throughout the US, based just as much on ethnicity and geographical location as on theology. Starting in the early 1900s these denominations began to merge or split off until we are left with three major Lutheran denominations, plus a few dozen smaller ones, in the US. Although each of

²⁸ Lawrence O’Toole, “The Week,” *Entertainment Weekly*, August 5, 1994, 58-59.

²⁹ John G. Bateson et al., “History,” Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, 2013, <https://www.swpasynod.org/history>.

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these denominations had their own media department that would produce materials specific to that denomination, the LCA almost certainly had the largest, and the most reach, and will thus be the one examined in this thesis.³⁰

The most well-known work that the LCA helped to produce (and arguably one of the most prominent religious television programs in America) was Art Clokey's *Davey and Goliath*. Originally produced in 1960 by the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA), one of the denominations that would eventually merge to form the LCA, the series laid the foundation for many religious children's program to follow. Each 15-minute episode would follow Davey and his pet dog Goliath as they overcame obstacles through their faith in God. The series became a fixture of weekend television during the 1960s and '70s, with executives from multiple networks (the show was first-run syndication, and thus appeared on multiple networks) finding the faith-based, but ostensibly non-denominational show to have a broad appeal.³¹

The LCA also had a hand in producing media about more serious issues. In 1966, they released *A Time for Burning*, a cinéma vérité documentary about the difficulties an Omaha pastor faces in integrating his all-white congregation. Critically acclaimed upon its release, the film was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the Academy Awards the following year, and in 2006 was selected for the LOC's National Film Registry. This is all the more impressive when one learns that the film was a major gamble for the LCA – up until that point, they and production company Lutheran Film Associates,³² had only made scripted programs, so they were

³⁰ John G. Bateson et al., "History," Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, 2013, <https://www.swpasynod.org/history>.

³¹ Jeff Lenburg, "Davey and Goliath," in *The Encyclopedia of Animated Cartoons* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2009).

³² Lutheran Film Associates was created in 1957 by Lutheran Church Productions (LCP), which in turn was formed in 1951 by 6 Lutheran groups. See Dan Chyutin, "A Remarkable Adventure": Martin Luther and the 1950s Religious Marketplace," *Cinema Journal*, (Spring 2013): 25-48.

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nervous when Quest Productions, the company they had hired to make the film, wanted to make a mostly fly-on-the-wall documentary.³³ Needless to say, the gamble paid off.

If there was one filmmaker whose work most closely matched that of *The Amusement Park*, it was Rolf Forsberg. Forsberg worked almost exclusively in sponsored films, having a career that stretched from 1964 to 2003. He is most known for the stylistically experimental religious films that he made during the first decade of his career, with his first film, *Parable* (1964) even being inducted into the National Film Registry in 2012.³⁴ The film, as the title indicates, is a parable about the life of Christ, portrayed as a Pierrot-like clown entering a circus. The film was well received, if somewhat controversial due to its unorthodox depiction of Christ as well as its unconventional filmmaking style, with film scholars Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke comparing it and later Forsberg films to the works of Fellini and Bergman.³⁵ The website for Gospel Film Archive, which sells Forsberg's work on DVD, confirms this comparison, citing both filmmakers as inspirations for his later shorts.³⁶

However, the one thing that separates all these works (including Forsberg) from Romero is their messaging: all the works mentioned above are explicit in their religious message and influence, making no effort to hide their origins. *The Amusement Park*, meanwhile, is quite secular in both its message and presentation. Were it not for the fact that the Lutheran Service Society is given a credit at the end of the film, one would have no way of knowing that a religious organization made it.

³³ Ed Carter, "A Time for Burning," Library of Congress (Library of Congress), accessed January 16, 2023, https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-film-preservation-board/documents/time_for_burning.pdf.

³⁴ Mark Quigley, "Rolf Forsberg: The 50th Anniversary of *Parable* (1964) ...and a Happy 90th Birthday!:" UCLA Film & Television Archive," Rolf Forsberg: The 50th Anniversary of *Parable* (1964) ...and a Happy 90th Birthday! | UCLA Film & Television Archive, 2013, <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/blogs/archive-blog/2014/07/12/rolf-forsberg-50th-anniversary-parable-1964-and-happy-90th-birthday>.

³⁵ Terry Lindvall and Andrew Quicke, *Celluloid Sermons: The Emergence of the Christian Film Industry, 1930-1986* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 69-70.

³⁶ *The Antkeeper*, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.gospelfilmsarchive.com/antkeep.htm>.

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Due to the string of feature film failures that Romero had produced beforehand, it was clear that the film needed to be made on a much smaller budget than his previous work. In the budget breakdown created before production started, Romero only had \$12,000 out of a necessary \$34,320 needed to complete the film.³⁷ Most of this money seems to have come from one Karl Rabeneck, an advertising executive who, according to a correspondence between him and Suzanne Desrocher-Romero sometime after George's death, was able to cover most of the general cost.³⁸ Karl's wife Carole, who was the director of the meals on wheels program for the area,³⁹ coordinated volunteers from several Lutheran churches in Western Pennsylvania to serve as extras during filming, and they were also able to secure a \$10,000 grant from the Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance organization (now Thrivent Insurance) in order to cover distribution costs. Karl seems to have been the bridge that connected Romero with the Lutheran Service Society – Rabeneck clearly had an interest in media production, and was also heavily involved in the Lutheran Church. In fact, the same year that production began on *The Amusement Park*, Karl was elected "vice chairman of the American Lutheran Church's standing committee for communication and mission support,"⁴⁰ the American Lutheran Church (ALC) being another denomination of Lutheranism that later merged with the LCA in the 1980s to form the ELCA.

The film was shot in three days. Romero gathered up some Latent Image regulars, including S. William "Bill" Hinzman (still photographer and cameraman for Romero's early works, director of photography for *The Crazies*, and the first Zombie seen in *Night of the Living Dead*) for cinematography and the previously mentioned Michael Gornick as assistant camera,

³⁷ Budget for *The Amusement Park*, n.d., SC.2019.03, Box 54, Folder 8, George A. Romero Archival Collection, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA

³⁸ Karl Rabeneck to Suzanne Desrocher-Romero, n.d., SC.2019.03, Box 54, Folder 8, George A. Romero Archival Collection, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA.

³⁹ Frank Hawkins, ed., "Meals-on-Wheels Director Named," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 20, 1971, 4.

⁴⁰ John Troan, ed., "Broadcasters Hold Dinner," *Pittsburgh Press*, October 13, 1973, 4.

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and simply went to work. Despite the hardships that Latent had been going through at the time, Bonnie Hinzman (Bill's then wife) later recalled that the mood during production was fairly upbeat.⁴¹ George, however, apparently gave little thought to the film once he made it. As Suzanne stated during a panel discussion included in the special features of *The Amusement Park*, she suspects this was “because it was a very quick shoot, it was his first job (and only job) that he was *hired* to do. It was never supposed to be published in any way, so he just thought, ‘Eh, you know, it was nothing.’”⁴²

The Amusement Park opens with a three-and-a-half-minute prologue by lead actor Lincoln Maazel, playing himself as he walks around the deserted West View Park, where the film was shot. Directly to the audience, he talks about how comparatively lucky he is – he's almost 71, but has a family, is working, and is overall satisfied with his life. However, he points out that many elderly people do not have the same fortune that he does, and are often ignored, neglected, or taken advantage of by society at large. The sequence ends with Maazel asking the audience to remember that one day they too will be old.

This opening scene is sedate in tone and composition. This changes quickly - after the opening credits conclude, we cut to an all-white room. A battered, disheveled, and exhausted Maazel (the character is given no name, but is credited as “Old Man” on IMDB. The character shall be referred to as “Maazel” for simplicity) stares at the ground, his white suit dirty and torn. A clock ticks, then dissolves into an eerie drone. A door in the background opens, and we see another Maazel walk in, this one exhibiting none of the injuries of the first. The new Maazel attempts to engage in small talk, asking if the old Maazel wants to go outside. The old Maazel,

⁴¹ *Bill & Bonnie's Excellent Adventure*. USA: Red Shirt Pictures, 2022.

⁴² Zimmerman, Samuel, Suzanne Desrocher-Romero, Sandra Schulberg, Greg Nicotero, and Daniel Kraus. Panel discussion moderated by Shudder's Samuel Zimmerman. Zoom Panel, unknown date and month, 2020. Zoom call included in special features of film.

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almost too exhausted and drained to reply, says “Th-there’s nothing, nothing out-outside.” The new Maazel replies that he’s going outside anyway, and opens the door again, this time revealing an active amusement park outside.

At first, Maazel seems to enjoy his time at the park, but quickly things start to go wrong for him. He’s barred from more exciting rides due to his age, he becomes the victim of a pickpocket, and is even brutalized by a group of bikers, one of whom is dressed like the grim reaper. These incidents begin to build up, with Maazel accumulating both physical and mental scars as each misfortune befalls him. He becomes more distraught and anxious, as every attempt to find help is either unsuccessful (such as when he fails to elicit attention from either a cop or a priest), or are woefully inadequate (such as when he visits a clinic for medical attention, only to be rushed through the building, given a small piece of gauze to place on his head, and then shoved out the door).

Eventually, after a failed attempt to read a fairy tale to a little girl, Maazel gives up, and heads back to the door he came from. He walks in, and we are back where we started – in a blank white void, with a battered, disheveled, and exhausted Maazel sitting alone. A door in the background opens, and we see another Maazel walk in, the scene playing out exactly like it did at the beginning of the film. The newer Maazel leaves the void, and we fade out on a shot of the older Maazel, alone and helpless in an unfamiliar landscape. The film ends with a closing remark by Maazel, now out of character again, as he tells the audience that “the man in the amusement park is a mirror image of yourself, separated only by the passage of time.”

When *The Amusement Park* was in production, Rubinstein had already become business partners with Romero. He is credited as an associate producer on *The Amusement Park*, and the opening credits refer to *The Amusement Park* as “a Laurel production”. Adding to the confusion

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is that Laurel does not seem to have been formed until partway through *The Amusement Park's* production. According to documents obtained from the George A. Romero collection at the University of Pittsburgh while Laurel was in charge of distributing the film to festivals in 1975 and most likely had a hand in at least some of the production, another group, Communicators Pittsburgh, was to have been in charge of attracting investors.⁴³ Communicators Pittsburgh was a local advertising firm founded in 1972 by Rabeneck, who in addition to covering some of the film's expenses, was also credited as a producer on *The Amusement Park*.⁴⁴

There was optimism that the partnership between Laurel and Communicators Pittsburgh would serve as a stepping stone for larger projects. In an article for the *Pittsburgh-Post Gazette*, columnist George Anderson mentions that Romero had “received word that his Western script, ‘Gunperson,’ will be shot in Israel on sets recently used by Gregory Peck’s independent company, as an American-German-French-Israeli co-production, slated for shooting late this year,” with Claudia Cardinale being considered for the film. Anderson also mentions that Laurel and Communicators were trying to get an adaptation of “The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou” by Kristin Hunter produced, with Ossie Davis cited as a possible director.⁴⁵ Neither of these projects panned out, although Romero would try to get “Gunperson” produced at least as far as 1978.⁴⁶

The Amusement Park was not meant to have a wide release, or even to be screened in theaters. According to Suzanne in an interview I conducted, the film was likely meant to be screened at churches in the Pittsburgh area as a way to drum up support for the Service Society.⁴⁷

⁴³ Nadine Covert and Maureen Gaffney to Laurel Tape and Film Inc., March 1975, SC.2019.03, Box 54, Folder 8, George A. Romero Archival Collection, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA

⁴⁴ “Legal Notices,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 7, 1972, p. 14.

⁴⁵ George Anderson, “Only Name Is Changed to Protect ‘Crazies’,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 17, 1973, 23.

⁴⁶ Adam Charles Hart, “Gunperson: Romero's Gender-Flipped Western,” University of Pittsburgh Library System Horror Studies, accessed February 8, 2023, <https://horrorstudies.library.pitt.edu/content/gunperson-romeros-gender-flipped-western>.

⁴⁷ Rubin, Benjamin, and Suzanne Desrocher. Zoom Interview with Suzanne Desrocher. Personal, January 30, 2023. See appendix for partial transcript of interview.

Once the Service Society rejected the film, Laurel tried to promote the film at festivals, including the American Film Festival in New York.⁴⁸ This is why some sources list the film as having been made in 1975 instead of 1973: 1975 is when Romero started to show the film at festivals.

Eventually, though, Laurel gave up on promoting the film, and left it to languish in obscurity.

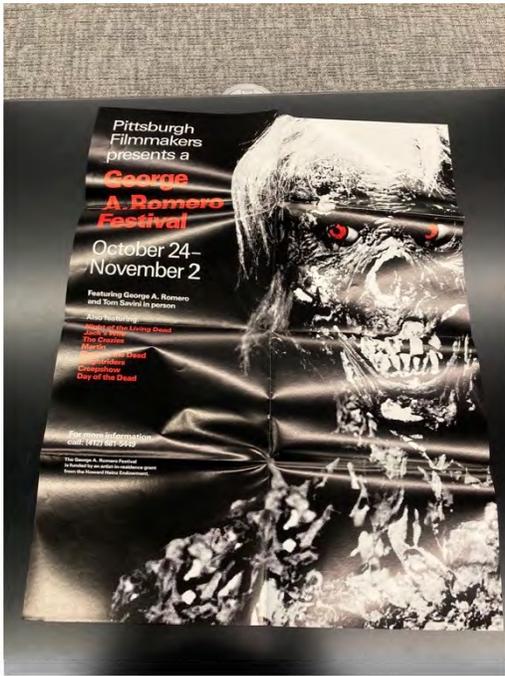


Fig 1. Poster for 1988 George A. Romero Festival. *The Amusement Park* was among the films screened.

It appeared sporadically at festivals over the next four decades. For example, in 1988, around the time of *Night of the Living Dead's* twentieth anniversary, Pittsburgh Filmmakers, an important organization held screenings for many of Romero's works up to that point, including *The Amusement Park* (see Fig 1 for the poster produced for that screening).⁴⁹ The more recent screening, and the one that ties directly into the preservation of the film, was held at the 2001 Torino Film Festival during a retrospective on Romero's career. It, along with several other shorts, was screened on November 19 and 20, after which time the film would go dormant once again. In 2003,

Giulia D'Agnolo Vallan joined the Torino Film Festival as a curator and 14 years later, aware that George had terminal lung cancer, decided to send him whatever material from the 2001 screening she could find, which included a DVD and 16mm copy of *The Amusement Park*.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Nadine Covert and Maureen Gaffney to Laurel Tape and Film Inc., March 1975, SC.2019.03, Box 54, Folder 8, George A. Romero Archival Collection, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA

⁴⁹ Pittsburgh Filmmakers George A. Romero Festival posters, 1988, SC.2019.03, Box 94, Folder 2, George A. Romero Archival Collection, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA

⁵⁰ 19th Torino Film Festival program, November 2001, SC.2019.03, Box 91, Folder 19, George A. Romero Archival Collection, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA

Once the film was “re-discovered,” a new wave of festival screenings began. In March 2018, and while Suzanne and IndieCollect were still in the process of restoring the film (as discussed in the following section), the 16mm print sent to the Romeros was shown at Spectacle Theater in Brooklyn.⁵¹ The legality of these screenings was somewhat nebulous, since they were showing the original film (which was still in the public domain, due to a lack of original copyright. This will be expanded upon in the following section) and not a restoration, but Suzanne and IndieCollect sent them a cease and desist in order to guarantee that the GARF owned the copyright to the film.⁵²

Once the restoration was complete, the film had its official premiere on October 12, 2019, at the Regent Square Theater in Pittsburgh.⁵³ More festival screenings soon followed: in June 2021, around the time the film was being released on the streaming service Shudder, the 50th International Film Festival Rotterdam – a prestigious showcase for independent and experimental cinema worldwide – held a screening of the restoration as part of their “Cinema Regained” series.⁵⁴ On July 9th, the film had its Asian premier at the 25th Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival in South Korea.⁵⁵

One question remains: Why would the Service Society go to George A. Romero? While it’s not surprising that Romero, strapped for cash and desperate for a stream of revenue, would agree to the project, why would the Service Society think it would be a good idea to ask a

⁵¹ “The Amusement Park,” Spectacle Theater, February 28, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180303223915/https://www.spectacletheater.com/the-amusement-park/>.

⁵² Interview with Suzanne Desrocher-Romero., January 30, 2023

⁵³ Liam Ferguson, “‘Lost’ George Romero Film The Amusement Park Premiering This October,” CGMagazine, September 20, 2019, <https://www.cgmagonline.com/news/lost-george-romero-film-the-amusement-park-premiering-this-october/>.

⁵⁴ “Programme IFFR 2021,” IFFR, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://iffr.com/en/iff/2021/a-z>.

⁵⁵ “The Amusement Park,” BIFAN, 2021, http://www.bifan.kr/eng/program/program_view.asp?pk_seq=5926&sc_category_seq=4009&sc_num=1&actEvent=view.

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director most famous for his work in horror to make a film about elder abuse? While I could not find a definitive answer, I do have a theory. While the Service Society had been around for decades, and their Meals on Wheels and elderly support programs were popular, by 1973 they were starting to struggle financially. Multiple articles from local newspapers note the Service Society had lost a significant amount of funding from the federal government due to budget cuts by the Nixon administration,⁵⁶ cuts which almost caused them to shut down the Meals on Wheels program.⁵⁷ Add on to that the fact that there were not many film production companies in the Pittsburgh area, and the Service Society may have chosen Romero out of economic necessity, hoping that he would tone down some of his stylistic flourishes. This is not an uncommon phenomenon, and as will be discussed below, is something that has happened to many a horror filmmaker. The Service Society could also have hired him less for his work in horror and more for his work on commercials – after all, Romero and Latent Image had become well known in the Pittsburgh area for those commercials prior to *Night of the Living Dead*, so it's not hard to assume that *that* was what the Service Society wanted.

Part 2: Restoration of the Living Movie

We return now to 2017, when Sandra Schulberg, the head of IndieCollect first received the prints from Suzanne. Sandra Schulberg started out as a producer, having worked on films such as the Academy Award recipient *Quills* (2000), the Sundance winning *Waiting for the Moon* (1987), and the PBS series *American Playhouse*, before moving on to producing documentary films. Having been inspired by her work saving the film negatives found at the former headquarters of DuArt films, she eventually founded IndieCollect in 2014. It's initial

⁵⁶ Tom Stokes, "State Welfare Official Hits Nixon Cutbacks in Talk," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 24, 1973.

⁵⁷ Frank Hawkins, ed., "Fund Short Elderly," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 12, 1970.

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mission was to help find homes for orphan works, thus serving as a “foster-care agency for orphaned films”, to quote a New York Times Article about the DuArt archive.⁵⁸ Eventually, they expanded the mission to the restoration of independent film, with IndieCollect now having helped to preserve and redistribute over 40 films, including *The Atomic Café* (1982), *Cane River* (1980/2020), and *The Believer* (2001).⁵⁹

Given how important Romero is to the history of independent American cinema, one can easily see why she would be drawn to the project.

When Schulberg first examined the prints, she expressed in 2021 that she was less than optimistic about restoring the film. “We kept hoping that another print of superior quality [would be found], but unfortunately, both the prints were not only scarred in many ways, they had obviously been used, but...what was more difficult was that they were extremely faded, both of them,” she said during the panel discussion mentioned earlier. “We generally prefer to restore a movie from the original film negative, and...if the negative has been lost or destroyed, the next best iteration is the interpositive, then you go to an internegative...generally the least satisfactory material from which to work is a print, especially a print that has suffered...” She doubts that there is a better version out there: “the original elements are gone...we and Suzanne don’t know what happened to them.”⁶⁰ As the restoration process went on, other copies of the film were found, but these were in as bad if not worse shape than the copy sent to George, and thus were unusable in the restoration process.

Much of the restoration work was carried out by a team of four working at IndieCollect: Anastasia Cipolla, Oskar Miarka, Anne-Marie Desjardins, and Yixin Wang. Desjardins and

⁵⁸ John Anderson, “The Movie Crypt at the Top of the Stairs,” *The New York Times*, August 20, 2014.

⁵⁹ For a complete list of films they have worked on, see “Restorations,” IndieCollect, December 21, 2022, <https://indiecollect.org/restorations/>.

⁶⁰ Zimmerman et al.

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Wang scanned the prints, while Cipolla and Miarka were in charge of color correction as well as sound digitization. The scanning, while only a relatively small part of the restoration process, still required a lot of care in order to prevent further damage to the film. According to Desjardins in an interview conducted for this thesis, the film prints suffered from severe vinegar syndrome, and thus were extremely delicate and brittle. IndieCollect uses a Kinetta film scanner, which was made specifically with shrunken, damaged, or delicate film in mind.⁶¹

Color correction and sound digitization was also a difficult process. The print that Suzanne received had faded to the point where only the magenta dye was left (this can be seen in fig. 2). According to Anastasia in a separate interview she conducted with me for this thesis, the DVD copy (which Suzanne suspects was made film festival for its 2001 retrospective) of the film still had all the color preserved, despite the DVD itself being low quality. As such, Anastasia and Oskar color corrected the scans using DaVinci Resolve in order to match as closely as possible the color found in the DVD copy. DaVinci Resolve was also used to remove



Fig 2. Photograph of unrestored copy of *The Amusement Park*

any dirt or scratches, making sure not to remove too much of the natural film grain present in the film.

The sound, meanwhile, was its own issue. The scanner could not convert the optical soundtrack on the film print into digital sound. Therefore, Cipolla and Miarka scanned the optical soundtrack as if it were part of film itself, and then used

⁶¹ Interview with Anne-Marie Desjardins, January 17, 2023.

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a software called AEO-Light to convert the soundtrack into digital audio. All told, it took the team at IndieCollect over a year and half to fully scan the film, fix the faded color, and convert the optical soundtrack into a digital one.⁶²

One thing to note is that another version of *The Amusement Park* was made during its original release. The back of the brochure made to promote the film states “[*The Amusement Park*] is available in 54-minute and 27-minute versions.”⁶³ While one can assume that the 27-minute version is an edited version of the 54-minute version, without a copy, there is no way to know for certain. There’s also the fact that Schulberg, at several points during the panel discussion, mentions IndieCollect was able to get a second 16mm copy of the film, but does not specify when and how they received it. Later conversations with several of the people involved in the restoration have stated that the second copy came from Bonnie Hinzman. Ben Rubin (no relation), collection coordinator at the University of Pittsburgh’s George A. Romero Collection, has also stated that one of the 16mm copies is with the University of Pittsburgh’s special collections, while the other is owned by the George A. Romero Foundation (GARF), an organization Suzanne set up in 2018. Suzanne also stated in the interview conducted for this thesis that there were two other copies of the film that she is aware of – one belongs to Tony Buba, a Pittsburgh filmmaker who had worked on several Romero projects, and the other belongs to a private collector in Texas. Upon inspection, both prints were found to be in worse shape than Suzanne’s copy, so they were soon returned to their original owners after inspection.⁶⁴

⁶² Rubin, Benjamin, and Anastasia Cipolla. Interview with Anastasia Cipolla. Personal, March 11, 2023.

⁶³ *The Amusement Park: A Film on the Problems of Aging in Our Society*. Pittsburgh, PA: Communications/Pittsburgh, 1974.

⁶⁴ Interview with Suzanne Desrocher-Romero., January 30, 2023.

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Copyright was also an issue that needed to be resolved before the film could be made available to the public. As far as Suzanne knew, there had been no copyright filed on the film, making it an orphan work (This was sadly not surprising, given the before mentioned copyright issues around *Night of the Living Dead*, although given that the responsibility for filing the copyright rested on the Service Society, it is interesting that they either opted not to or somehow forgot). However, in order for the GARF to obtain a copyright on the restored version of the film, Suzanne wanted to ask anyone involved in the project who was still alive if they would waive any potential copyright claims. This included Karl Rabeneck, Bonnie Hinzman, and Richard P. Rubinstein. Rubinstein in particular was a potential problem because, as stated before, Rubinstein is notorious for being reluctant to release films he owns the rights to, so there was a legitimate fear that, if he still owned the rights to the film, he might not be willing to let any restoration be done, let alone distribution. However, according to Suzanne, Rubinstein actually didn't play a role in the production of the film and was surprised when he learned that his name was listed in the film's credits.⁶⁵ He was thus more than willing to give distribution rights to the GARF.

In fact, as far as Suzanne was concerned, most of the work done in preparing the film for a new copyright registration, while time-consuming and tedious, did not present many problems to the GARF and Yellow Veil Pictures, the company Suzanne had picked to distribute the film. The one exception to this was the music: while most of the music could be identified (and thus have any copyright claims cleared), there was one 45-second music clip that could not be identified. Suzanne had never heard the music before, and IndieCollect could not determine what music library Romero might have acquired it from. Because of this, Suzanne (with some

⁶⁵ Ibid.

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reluctance) and IndieCollect agreed to replace the music with another track that sounded similar. The replacement piece, according to Suzzanne, came from DeWolfe Music, a prominent music library that Romero had used before in the past. In a later follow-up email, she said that the piece in question was “Ragtime Razzamatazz” by Herbert Chappell, and was used during the scene where Maazel tries to order a meal at a restaurant.⁶⁶ In an interesting bit of trivia, the piece had been used previously in Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*, and in fact many of Chappell’s (as well as other artists licensed by DeWolfe) music was used in that film.

Part 3: But what does it all mean?

At first glance, it may appear that *The Amusement Park* is an outlier within Romero’s filmography: whereas most of his work, whether it be his feature films or his commercial work, are made in an almost documentary-like realism, *The Amusement Park* is decidedly more expressionistic than most of his other works, taking on an explicitly allegorical tone. The whole film is shot in a dreamlike, almost surreal style, with unnatural camera angles, strangely dressed characters (there’s a scene where a group of bikers beat up the main character, one of whom is dressed like the Grim Reaper), and exaggerated performances. However, while Romero’s change in style was abrupt, it was not singular, and while no other film reaches quite the same level of abstraction and allegory as *The Amusement Park*, its influence could still be seen in the films Romero made immediately after.

In order to look at where the film fits in within Romero’s greater body of work, one must first look at the two feature-length films that came immediately before and after it: *The Crazies*, and *Martin*. *The Crazies*, as previously stated, was Romero’s return to the horror genre, so it is

⁶⁶ Email to Suzzanne Desrocher-Romero, June 2, 2023.

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no surprise that it builds upon some of the ideas and concepts that were present in *Night of the Living Dead*. The film is about the real-life town of Evans City, PA, as it is placed under quarantine by the federal government after a chemical weapon named Trixie is accidentally leaked into the water supply. Said chemical causes its victims to become violently insane, and the town quickly devolves into chaos.

The film is shot in an almost documentary style, with the focus not being on a specific character, but various groups of people as they struggle to survive the literal madness descending upon the town. The only stylized element is found in the gore effects, with the blood being colored a tempera red, rather than a realistic one (not unlike other horror films at the time).

If *The Crazies* is documentary-like in style, and *The Amusement Park* is expressionistic, then *Martin* is a middle ground between the two, being shot mostly in a realist manner, but including expressionistic scenes and moments that help to reinforce the movie's themes. This unorthodox vampire film follows the titular character as he moves to the Pittsburgh suburb of Braddock to live with his cousin Tateh Cuda, played by Lincoln Maazel, in his only major film role besides *The Amusement Park*. Despite his teenage appearance, Cuda firmly believes that Martin is a "Nosferatu", and threatens to stab Martin through the heart if he kills anyone under his watch. What makes the film interesting is that we are never given any confirmation as to whether Martin is a vampire or not – Martin certainly believes he's an 84-year-old vampire, and the film confirms that he's a serial killer who drinks the blood of his victims, but outside of sunlight hurting his eyes, he seems to have no vampiric characteristics besides that. He even scoffs at Cuda's attempts to control him through traditional methods: when Cuda holds up a

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crucifix, Martin just knocks it away, telling Cuda, “There is no real magic. There’s no real magic ever.”⁶⁷

As previously stated, the cinematography, being a combination of the realism of *The Crazies* and the abstraction of *The Amusement Park*, helps to reinforce the film’s theme of magic vs. reality. The film is mostly shot in a style similar to *The Crazies*, with the camera paying as much attention to Braddock’s urban decay as to the characters themselves, as well as unobtrusive editing. This style changes, however, whenever Martin has a flashback to his life before moving in with Cuda. Whether these flashbacks actually happened or not is never clarified, and it is possible that they are nothing more than Martin’s delusions. The movie conveys this ambiguity by having all the flashbacks in black and white (as opposed to the dreary colors of the rest of the film). The content of these flashbacks is more romanticized than the rest of the film, with Martin’s vampirism being portrayed as seductive, his victim being in love with him, as well as borderline stereotypical images of his native “Rumania,” up to and including angry torchlit mobs.

How much of this contrast was intentional on Romero’s part, however, is not clear. While Romero had shot the film in color, his original cut was 165 minutes and printed entirely in black and white. Conflicts with Richard P. Rubinstein, however, led to run time being reduced by nearly 70 minutes, and all but the flashback scenes restored to their original colors. A 16mm copy of the original cut was only rediscovered by Kevin Kriess and the Living Dead Museum in October 2021, and is still undergoing restoration at time of writing.⁶⁸ How this new version will impact future analysis of Romero’s work in general (and *Martin* in particular) is unknown.

⁶⁷ *Martin* (Laurel Pictures, 1975).

⁶⁸ Chris Evangelista, “The Director's Cut of George Romero's Vampire Movie Martin Has Been Found,” /Film (/Film, November 4, 2021), <https://www.slashfilm.com/652558/the-directors-cut-of-george-romeros-vampire-movie-martin-has-been-found/>.

Romero was always resistant to people finding deeper meanings within his films.

Themes? Yes. Social commentary? Of course. But deep symbolic meaning is not something that appealed to him. "Just because I'm showing somebody being disemboweled doesn't mean I have to get heavy with a message,"⁶⁹ he said in a 1982 interview. This social commentary is often apparent in his works, to the point of being heavy-handed. Much has already been written about how *Dawn of the Dead* is a critique of consumerism, or how *Night of the Living Dead* was a

commentary on the social upheavals happening at the end of the 1960s.⁷⁰ Even his minor works contain obvious examples of this kind of social commentary: *The Crazies* has been interpreted as a commentary on the Vietnam War and the growing distrust the public had with the federal

government.⁷¹ This kind of messaging can be seen at 20:55 in the film, where a shot of a child holding a toy machine gun is followed by a shot of a group of soldiers in hazmat suits holding similar guns coming to take the child and his family away.

The Amusement Park is interesting, then, in that it is one of the few times where subtext

explicitly becomes text. A literal example of this can be seen on the signs that appear at rides throughout the park, with messages such as "MUST NOT FEAR THE UNKNOWN" or "MUST HAVE INDIVIDUAL INCOME OVER \$3,500.00" (see Fig 3). The scene

breakdown made before filming started is even more blatant: Scene 19, where the protagonist,



Fig 3. One of the subtle signs found in *The Amusement Park*

⁶⁹ Gagne,
⁷⁰ See Hervey, Dillard, and Higashi for examples of this type of analysis as it applies to *Night of the Living Dead*
⁷¹ For an example of this type of interpretation, see Williams, 2015 65-79.

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is unable to pay for a hospital visit, represents the “Difficulty of aged in meeting health service regulations and paper-work difficulties of the aged.”⁷² Some of this may be due to the inherently didactic nature of educational and sponsored films, but considering how Romero never made another sponsored film after this, there’s no way to be certain.

While conceptually *The Amusement Park* is unique among Romero’s films, it is not his most stylistically distinguished work. That honor would go to the 1982 anthology horror film *Creepshow*, which takes influence from both the EC horror comics that inspire its plot and structure, as well as the highly saturated color pallet of Dario Argento’s *Suspiria* (1977). Argento was a producer on *Dawn of the Dead* and had distributed and edited the film for European markets. In other words, while *The Amusement Park* is edited and structured in an expressionistic way, its visual design remains similar to *The Crazies* and especially *Martin*.

Part 4: Parallel Lives

It was (and to a lesser extent, still is) not unusual for Hollywood and independent commercial feature film directors to occasionally make industrial, corporate, or educational films. Prominent Hollywood directors such as Frank Capra, Mervyn LeRoy, Elia Kazan, and Robert Altman⁷³ have, at some point or another, all directed sponsored works. However, there’s often a tendency for these works to be overlooked in the biographies of these artists, as work-for-hire assignments are often presumed to have little artistic input from the director, and thus not as worthy of study. I argue that this is incorrect, as shown not only in *The Amusement Park*’s visual experimentation, but also in the experimentation of other filmmakers, and even studios that focused solely on industrial films. As such, in order to examine how other filmmakers made

⁷² *The Amusement Park* Treatment and Scene Outline, n.d., SC.2019.03, Box 1, Folder 10, George A. Romero Archival Collection, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA

⁷³ Industrial films by these directors are listed in Rick Prelinger’s *The Field Guide to Sponsored Films*

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artistically creative industrial films, let's look at two earlier directors and a movie produced by several emerging artists, each of which are both artistically driven and relevant to Romero and *The Amusement Park*: Herk Harvey, Edgar G. Ulmer, and On Film, Inc.'s idiosyncratic sponsored short *Pittsburgh* (1959).

There is a temptation to apply auteur theory when looking at the filmography of these and other industrial filmmakers. After all, if we are looking for stylistic experimentation within these works, then it would surely stand to reason that these artistic flourishes are extensions of a director's personal style. However, many scholars of industrial and educational films caution against the use of auteur theory when examining such works. In an interview with Patrick Vonderau, Rick Prelinger, a famed researcher on what he calls "ephemeral films" (a catch-all term for industrial, educational, sponsored and amateur films), said that due to the often-anonymous nature of creating industrial and educational films, it can be difficult to attribute authorship to a single filmmaker.⁷⁴ "It would be a great leap forward for cinema studies if we were able to avoid the auteur theory this time...it is possible to speak of auteurs and individual authorship with many sponsored films. It's just that the information is often so lacking."⁷⁵ Yvonne Zimmermann takes it a step further, and suggests that auteur theory and industrial films are antithetical to one another, since, as she put it, "The establishment of the auteur was based on a radical rejection of the sponsored film as an outdated, ideologically and artistically unacceptable form of production."⁷⁶ For the purposes of this thesis, I will, for the most part,

⁷⁴ For an example of the kind of collective filmmaking practiced in educational filmmaking, see Faye E Riley's "Centron, an Industrial/Educational Film Studio, 1947-1981: A Microhistory," in *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*

⁷⁵ Patrick Vonderau, "Vernacular Archiving: An Interview with Rick Prelinger," in *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, ed. Patrick Vonderau and Vinzenz Hediger (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 51-61.

⁷⁶ Yvonne Zimmermann, "'What Hollywood Is to America, the Corporate Film Is to Switzerland': Remarks on Industrial Film as Utility Film," in *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, ed. Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 101-117.

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avoid auteur theory when analyzing other industrial filmmakers. The one exception to this will be Edgar G. Ulmer, whose work outside of corporate films is substantive enough to allow for auteur theory to be applied, and whose work was even championed by auteurists like Francois Truffaut.

It should also be noted that it was also not unusual for directors primarily associated with the horror genre to make industrial films. Jon Dieringer, a film programmer who runs the website *Screen Slate*, has created a detailed filmography of industrial films made by horror and exploitation directors (including Romero and Herk Harvey), ranging in notoriety from Russ Meyer (*Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*) to Don Barton (*Zaat*).⁷⁷ Most of these directors and their works will not be discussed so as to keep this thesis more focused, the exceptions being Harvey and Romero.

Herk Harvey is, in many ways, an alternate version of George Romero. Like Romero, he got his start in making industrial and corporate films. Also like Romero, his first feature-length film was a black-and-white low-budget horror production that was radically different from other films being released at the time. Unlike Romero, however, Harvey's feature-length debut, *Carnival of Souls* (1962), would remain his only theatrically-released film. It failed to draw in commercial or (seemingly) critical attention. It was not until the 1980s, over 20 years after its initial release, that the film started to gain critical attention, with reviewers noting its atmosphere and cinematography. Roger Ebert, for instance, commented that the film was like a "lost episode of the Twilight Zone," and, more importantly, "a shot of dead souls at an abandoned amusement park reminded me of the lurching undead in '*The Night of the Living Dead*'".⁷⁸ Whether

⁷⁷ Jon Dieringer (2013). Many thanks to Dieringer for sending me a copy of the filmography

⁷⁸ Ebert, Roger. "'Carnival' Doesn't Rely on Gory Special Effects to Generate Eerie Energy" Review of *Carnival of Souls*. *Chicago Sun-Times*, (October 27, 1989). <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/carnival-of-souls-1989>.

Carnival of Souls had a direct influence on Romero and *Night of the Living Dead* is hard to say – while it certainly prefigured it, I’ve found no direct evidence that Romero acknowledged its influence. Several sources, such as Kier-La Janisse for the Criterion Collection⁷⁹ and Andrew Taylor for Collider⁸⁰, have said that the film influenced George A. Romero and other filmmakers, such as David Lynch, with the earliest being from the Siskel and Ebert review of the film when it was re-released in 1989. The influences he has mentioned, such as Powell and Pressburger’s *The Tales of Hoffman* (1951), are not so readily apparent.⁸¹ One could just as easily claim that the 1964 film *The Last Man on Earth* influenced Romero, since it also features lurching, zombie-like beings and has the added benefit of being based on *I Am Legend*, a 1954 novel by Richard Matheson that Romero has admitted to being an influence.⁸²

However, while the film is the most famous work Harvey produced, it is certainly not his only work – Harvey made dozens, if not hundreds, of industrial shorts for Centron films, both before and after *Carnival of Souls*. In his book on educational movies made between 1945 and 1970, author Ken Smith quotes Harvey as saying, “I’ve been to festivals and people always ask, ‘How come you made only one film?’ And I say, ‘Hell, I’ve made over four hundred.’”⁸³ Harvey is probably exaggerating here – while he was certainly involved in making hundreds of films at Centron in at least some capacity, the exact number he directed is unknown. While not all of these works are as artistically driven as *Carnival*, Jon Dieringer does list several that he argues are “particularly comparable” to it.⁸⁴ Since Dieringer only gives a summation of each of these

⁷⁹ Kier-La Janisse, “Carnival of Souls: ‘Thinkin’ like That, Don’t It Give You Nightmares?” The Criterion Collection, July 12, 2016, <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/4143-carnival-of-souls-thinkin-like-that-dont-it-give-you-nightmares>.

⁸⁰ Andrew Taylor, “How the Surreal Horror Film ‘Carnival of Souls’ Rose from the Dead,” Collider, July 26, 2022, <https://collider.com/carnival-of-souls-horror-film-rose-from-dead/>.

⁸¹ Gagne, 12

⁸² Gagne, 5. For more info on how *The Last Man on Earth* may have influenced Romero, see Hervey, 10

⁸³ Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945-1970* (New York, NY: Blast Books, Inc., 1999), 108

⁸⁴ Jon Dieringer (2013).

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films and their artistic merits, I will go in more depth on three of them in order to analyze Harvey as an artist: *None for the Road* (1957), *Dance, Little Children* (1961) and *Shake Hands with Danger* (1975).

None for the Road, an anti-drunk driving film made for the Kansas State Board of Health, is the most (for lack of a better word) subdued of three films. Ken Smith, in his book on educational films made between 1945 and 1970, even notes that this is "...one of the tamer films in the driver safety genre."⁸⁵ Indeed, the film is actually quite bland for the majority of its runtime, focusing on a group of young adults drinking at a diner before two of them get into an accident. Interspersed is footage of a doctor explaining how alcohol slows reaction time – and shows this using lab mice he says he injected with pure alcohol. Outside of this somewhat disturbing image, as well as some distant and blurry footage of the car accident, there is little of the gore and violence found in other drunk driving films Smith lists. This is not to say that the film is without artistic merit, or even that it is not well crafted – although most of the film is rather flat in presentation, Harvey does film the nighttime driving scenes at the end of the film with a remarkable sense of mood and atmosphere. There are even echoes of similar driving scenes in *Carnival of Souls*, where Harvey takes the atmosphere to a new level, and makes it so that the car is seemingly enveloped in darkness.

Dance, Little Children, also made for the Kansas State Board of Health, deals with a subject that (in 1961 Kansas, at least) must have been extremely taboo – venereal diseases, in particular syphilis. Ken Smith even jokingly notes that the film "...proves that teenagers in the early sixties really did have premarital sex."⁸⁶ The film, like *None for the Road*, is a mostly straightforward educational film, albeit one where the advice given has not held up to modern-

⁸⁵ Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945-1970* (New York, NY: Blast Books, Inc., 1999), 189.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 133.

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day standards (the word “condom” is never mentioned, and while the film does end with all of the victims being given penicillin, it also implies that the greatest damage the disease will do is emotional). However, unlike *None for the Road*, which showed Harvey’s ability to create a dark, moody atmosphere towards the end of the film, *Dance, Little Children* instead puts all its effort into one surreal scene towards the beginning. Dubbed the “frenzy to experience scene” by Smith, it features rapid editing, match cuts, and other cinematic techniques not found in the rest of the film.

The didactic nature of the film, however, turns what would be an interesting scene foreshadowing the danger the teens are putting themselves in, into an unintentionally campy one: the narrator overdramatically tells the partygoers to “Dance faster, little children...Faster, Faster! Race to live while you may!”, in a moment that brings to mind the piano scene in *Reefer Madness* (1936). Such unintentional camp is not unique to this film: as talented a filmmaker as Harvey might have been, not every short he made can come as close as these do to *Carnival of Souls*. In fact, no less than three of his shorts even had the misfortune of appearing on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*,⁸⁷ a cult television program where the hosts riff on bad movies. It should also be noted that some of the film’s original meaning may be missing to modern audiences: most copies of the film online are severely faded, to the point of looking almost black and white in certain areas, a far cry from what Dieringer described as “jukejoint neons and dusky joy riding.”

Shake Hands with Danger is probably Harvey's most well-known short,⁸⁸ albeit as a camp cult film. Made for the Caterpillar construction company, this film is the outlier of the two

⁸⁷ The films in question are *Cheating* (1952), *What About Juvenile Delinquency?* (1955), and *Why Study Industrial Arts* (1956)

⁸⁸ At least one copy of the short on youtube has over 5 million views at time of writing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v26fTGBEi9E>

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mentioned above in several ways – while *None for the Road* was shot in black in white, and *Dance, Little Children* was filmed in possibly muted color,⁸⁹ *Shake Hands with Danger* is filmed in bright color. *Shake Hands with Danger* is also aimed exclusively at an adult audience, while the other two films were made specifically for use in classrooms. Finally, while the first two were (relatively) restrained in how they approached their topics, *Shake Hands with Danger* holds back nothing – every gory detail of what could happen in industrial accidents is shown, which (when mixed with a surprisingly catchy country theme song) has probably helped the film live outside the relative obscurity of Harvey’s other works.

Although it is not so obvious with *Shake Hands with Danger*, we can clearly see in the other works by Harvey (and *Dance, Little Children* in particular) a conflict beginning to emerge. This conflict, between the creative vision of the filmmakers and the demands of outside forces, pops up repeatedly in many of the sponsored films discussed here. With Harvey, we see it with him struggling to reconcile the pedagogic aspects of the film with his own desire to give the movie a unique aesthetic, thus resulting in works that come off as tonally confused. As we’ll see with Ulmer and *Pittsburgh* (and as we saw with *The Amusement Park*), this can also be seen with producers being unhappy with the final product of the film.

Another example of a horror filmmaker working in industrial films is Edgar G. Ulmer. Unlike Harvey, who never made films for a major studio, or Romero, who only started working with Hollywood late in his career, Ulmer started out working with some of the biggest names in cinema, before being consigned to work at small, poverty row studios that focused almost exclusively on making B-movies. Ulmer, a Czech-born Jewish immigrant, began his film career as an assistant to F. W. Murnau, serving as a production designer for *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last*

⁸⁹ IMDB lists the film as being B&W, and the version of the film posted online by the National Library of Medicine is heavily faded, to the point where there’s almost no color left.

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Laugh, 1924). Ulmer followed Murnau to America in 1926 to help make *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927) and *4 Devils* (1928) before briefly returning to Germany to co-direct his first feature, *Menschen am Sonntag (People on Sunday)*, 1930) with Robert Siodmak and Billy Wilder. After returning to America, Ulmer made his first solo feature, *Damaged Lives* (1933), a nominally educational drama about syphilis that leans heavily into melodrama and exploitation (film scholar Noah Isenberg even refers to it as “protoexploitation” in his biography of Ulmer).⁹⁰ The following year, he made what would become one of his most well-known works, *The Black Cat* (1934). This eerie and atmospheric horror film would become Universal Pictures’ highest-grossing film of that year, be the first of eight films that would co-star Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff, and to this day remains a classic Universal Monster movie. However, due to a desire for more creative freedom (as well as an affair he was having with a producer’s wife),⁹¹ Ulmer left the Hollywood studio system, and would spend the rest of his career working on low-budget films of a variety of genres, subjects, and length. An extremely prolific filmmaker (the exact number is not known since Ulmer had a tendency to exaggerate the number of films he made in his lifetime),⁹² Ulmer’s work varies wildly in quality; as Erik Ulman put it in his profile on Ulmer for *Senses of Cinema*, “...one cannot deny that Ulmer produced a lot of dross.”⁹³

Instead of focusing on the dross that Ulmer produced in his feature work, let’s instead focus on the educational films he made soon after *The Black Cat*. Between 1937 and 1941, Ulmer made several films for the National Tuberculosis Association. Of these, six -- *Let My*

⁹⁰ Noah William Isenberg, *Edgar G. Ulmer: A Filmmaker at the Margins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 44.

⁹¹ Noah Isenberg, “Permanent Vacation: Home and Homelessness in the Life and Work of Edgar G. Ulmer,” in *The Films of Edgar G. Ulmer*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 1-20.

⁹² Noah Isenberg, “Perennial Detour: The Cinema of Edgar G. Ulmer and the Experience of Exile,” *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 2 (2004): 3-25, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2004.0006>, 4.

⁹³ Erik Ulman, “Edgar G. Ulmer,” *Senses of Cinema*, October 18, 2018, <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/ulmer/>.

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People Live (1938), *Goodbye Mr. Germ* (1940), *Cloud in the Sky* (1939), *Diagnostic Procedures* (1940), *Another to Conquer* (1941), and *They Do Come Back* (1940) -- are known to exist, and are currently available to view at the Internet Archive and elsewhere. Another two (*Mantoux Text* and *Life is Good*) are listed in a filmography of his works,⁹⁴ but may not survive (if they actually existed). In his typed notes on this period of time, Ulmer states that the films “were prepared, written, etc., in my spare time as a service and when available I was hired to produce and direct them – between my feature assignments and during layoff periods while I was under contract to Springer.”⁹⁵

The period in which Ulmer made his Tuberculosis films coincides with a specific point in Ulmer’s career. Having just been exiled from Hollywood, but not yet signing up to work with the Producers Releasing Corporation (PRC, for whom Ulmer would make most of his films with), Ulmer moved to New York to direct a series of movies directed towards specific ethnic, linguistic, and social groups. Called the “East Coast Ethnic Melodrama” period by Devin Orgeron⁹⁶ and the “Ethnic Intermezzo” period by Noah Isenberg,⁹⁷ Ulmer directed two films in Ukrainian, four in Yiddish, and one musical featuring an all-black cast,⁹⁸ all within a time span of about five years. This interest in so-called “ethnic” films can also be found in the Tuberculosis films: *Let My People Live* was made with black audiences in mind, *Cloud in the Sky* for Mexican Americans, and *Another to Conquer* for Native Americans (specifically the Diné people, as they are the ones presented in the film). All three approach their subject matters in similar ways, [New

⁹⁴ *The Films of Edgar G. Ulmer*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 298.

⁹⁵ Devin Orgeron, “Spreading the Word: Race, Religion, and the Rhetoric of Contagion in Edgar G. Ulmer’s TB Films,” in *Learning with the Lights off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 313

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 299

⁹⁷ Isenberg, “Perennial Detour”, 10

⁹⁸ For the titles of these films, see Herzogenrath, 298

sentence] with the people depicted in each movie being stricken with a Tuberculosis outbreak, the elders of the communities being reluctant to change and embrace scientific discoveries that may help, and the younger generations who do accept it, often with a religious undercurrent running through the film.⁹⁹ This is most explicit in *Let My People Live*, which starts with a black doctor giving a lecture on tuberculosis from the pulpit of a black church. As Orgeron succinctly puts it in his essay examining Ulmer's TB films, "Religion plays a key role in all three films. It is partly to blame, rooted as it is in tradition and faith rather than science. However, religious belief ultimately becomes a mechanism by which to smuggle science and medicine into the community."¹⁰⁰ This faith in science as a way to save lives can also be found in the other Tuberculosis films, although they focus solely on white characters and have little or no religious subtext.

However, this is not to say that they are lacking in Ulmer's directorial touches, or that they have nothing in common with their "ethnic" counterparts. *Goodbye Mr. Germ*, for example, displays many of the stylistic flourishes Ulmer used in *The Black Cat*. The film, about a scientist father who uses a fanciful situation to teach his kids about tuberculosis, features a "dream sequence" of sorts, wherein the scientist father is imagined as a kind of mad scientist, with a



Fig 4. Scene from *Goodbye, Mr. Germ* (1939)

gothic laboratory not unlike the one found in *The Black Cat* (see fig 4). There is also a kind of sensationalism present in nearly all the TB films, with overly dramatic narrators, characters placed in life-or-death situations, and a general

⁹⁹ It should be noted that, despite some poorly aged stereotypes and a somewhat condescending attitude towards traditional cultures, Ulmer is *much* more respectful of the people he represents in his films than was usual for his time.

¹⁰⁰ Orgeron, 302

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sense of melodrama. This sensationalism is, again, something that is also present in Ulmer's feature-length works, starting with his debut work, *Damaged Lives*. As previously mentioned, *Damaged Lives* is an educational film existing within the trappings of an exploitation film. For example, in one scene, the protagonist Donald (as well as the audience) is given a tour of a hospital by a doctor, who discusses what syphilis is, how it is contracted, and how it could be treated (although "treated" might be the wrong word; according to Marcel Arbeit in his essay on the film, one of the more common treatments for the disease was "arsenical compounds supplied intramuscularly or intravenously on a weekly basis").¹⁰¹ At the same time, the film would feature sensationalistic elements, most notably in the film's climax. There, Donald's wife Joan (who has contracted syphilis from her husband) attempts to perform a murder-suicide with him, and are only saved by a phone call from Joan's pregnant friend Marie.

The connection between the "Ethnic Intermezzo" and the TB films, as well as the stylistic choices of *Goodbye Mr. Germ*, and the sensationalism present throughout the film, are not the only instance of Ulmer's directorial tastes and vision being seen in these shorts. The very concepts of diseases and contagions are a recurring motif in Ulmer's work. To quote Orgeron, "...germs and a generalized notion of contagion seem to form the very foundation of this director's narrative logic." Two specific examples he cites are *Damaged Lives*, with its plot revolving around venereal disease, and *Detour* (1945), where the femme fatale character Vera is shown to be slowly dying of Tuberculosis.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Marcel Arbeit, "Ulmer's Anti-Syphilis Film: *Damaged Lives* and Its Novelization," in *Edgar G. Ulmer: Essays on the King of the B's*, ed. Bernd Herzogenrath (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 63-88.

¹⁰² Orgeron, "Spreading the Word", 298

However, despite the positive reception these films received,¹⁰³ Ulmer was not immune to censorship from his distributors and producers. According to Orgeron, there are in fact two radically different versions of *They Do Come Back*: the more well-known original, which was the version he worked with for his essay, and an edited version made sometime after the original. Both are credited as being made by Ulmer, and both are targeted toward young, white, working-class audiences, but the similarities end there. The re-edit features an entirely different story, narrator, and even soundtracks (the original begins with Brahms' Fourth Symphony, indicative of Ulmer's frequent use of German Classical music in his work. The re-edit has a more generic soundtrack by an uncredited composer). Orgeron is unsure why these changes were made, but speculates that it might be due to the distributors being uneasy with how the white, working-class characters were portrayed.

The last work we will examine, 1959's *Pittsburgh*, is arguably the most similar to *The Amusement Park*, in the sense that it too was made by artistically driven filmmakers, and whose Western Pennsylvania sponsor was so unimpressed with the work that it was shelved for an extended period of time before being rediscovered decades later. The film was meant to be screened during the city's bicentennial as a celebration of Pittsburgh, and, according to Sean P. Kilcoyne in his excellent essay on the film and its history, "an effort to reposition the pollution- and blight- infested Steel City as a hypermodern, nuclear-powered metropolis..."¹⁰⁴ The Pittsburgh Bicentennial Committee gave the assignment (as well as a budget of \$150,000) to New Jersey-based On Film Inc., which had previously made several industrial films for

¹⁰³ See Committee on Motion Pictures in Education, *Selected Educational Motion Pictures: A Descriptive Encyclopedia* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1942) for contemporaneous positive reviews of *Let My People Live*, *They Do Come Back*, and *Cloud in the Sky*.

¹⁰⁴ Sean P Kilcoyne, "Pittsburgh (1959): 'Equilibriums of Paradox' and the Bicentennial City of Tomorrow," *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 12, no. 2 (2012): 70-84, <https://doi.org/10.5749/movingimage.12.2.0070>.

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companies in the Pittsburgh area. In particular, they made a 1956 short film called *Color and Texture in Aluminum Finishes* for the Pittsburgh-based Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), which *New York Times* film critic Howard Thompson hailed as “the most strikingly imaginative industrial short subject ever filmed in the United States.”¹⁰⁵

The people that were involved in the making of the film are also remarkable: among those listed by Kilcoyne are photographers such as Arthur Fellig (a.k.a. Weegee) and W. Eugene Smith, and experimental filmmakers such as Stan VanDerBeek and Len Lye. The name most associated with the film (and the one whom Prelinger gives directing credit to in his entry on the film) is experimental film icon Stan Brakhage, credited in the movie under the pseudonym “James Stanley.” However, as Kilcoyne points out, how much involvement Brakhage (or any of the other names mentioned above) had in making the film is difficult to determine, since the film (especially in comparison to *The Amusement Park*) had a very troubled production. The first person in charge of the creative vision was On Film’s co-owner Bob Bell, whose initial vision of the film seems to be more conventional, with utilizing actors and a plot along with documentary footage. Unsatisfied with how the film was turning out, the project was handed over to Brakhage, who was told to “...hire whoever would be necessary to [improve the]...footage of Pittsburgh, which did not look at all beautiful.”¹⁰⁶ Brakhage thus became the second creative director of the film and invited Weegee, Lye, Smith, and VanDerBeek to help with the film. Although some footage from Brakhage’s time as director did make it into the final film (Kilcoyne points out Smith’s photographs were put through a prismatic lens by Weegee to create a surreal image of future Pittsburgh),¹⁰⁷ Brakhage too eventually had to leave the project. More than any other

¹⁰⁵ Howard Thompson, “New Arrivals in 16-MM.,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1957, sec. 2, 69.

¹⁰⁶ Kilcoyne, 74

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 75

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filmmaker mentioned in this essay, Brakhage was experimental, uncommercial, and unwilling to compromise in his artistic vision. As he later told the Pittsburgh Press in an article written after the film was rediscovered, “I used fast cutting beyond what anyone had done in a commercial film before. I was asked to take a vacation and quit.”¹⁰⁸

The third and final person in charge of the creative direction of the film (and the one whose version was finally shown to the Pittsburgh Bicentennial Committee) is a matter of debate: many sources (including the Pittsburgh Press article mentioned above) credit Willard Van Dyke, a documentary filmmaker who was no stranger to industrial filmmaking (Prelinger lists him as a director or co-director of thirteen films in his field guide),¹⁰⁹ and who would later become head of the film division at MoMA. However, his name does not appear in the film’s credits, and there’s no documentation of him working on the film. What’s more, Hugh Johnston, a photographer at On Film who did much of the actual filming and editing of the footage used, claims that he was the director of the final version. This, combined with the fact that some people who did work on the film (such as Stan VanDerBeek) were left uncredited, led Kilcoyne to conclude that “The details around who did what, and when, will probably remain murky at best, partly because the work itself was quite collaborative in nature.”¹¹⁰

Part 5: Conclusion

So, what can we take from all this? It’s obvious that *The Amusement Park* is worthy of preservation, if for no other reason than its uniqueness in Romero’s catalog: it’s the only film he made on commission (that wasn’t an advertisement), it’s the only one that shows a unique period

¹⁰⁸ Ed Blank, “On Shelf 22 Years, 'Pittsburgh' Premieres: Festival Screens \$150,000 Curiosity,” The Pittsburgh Press, June 10, 1979, sec. E.

¹⁰⁹ Prelinger

¹¹⁰ Kilcoyne, 77-78

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in between two of his major works, and it's unique for how dissimilar it is to his other works. It's also obvious that a large amount of time and care has been dedicated to the film's preservation and restoration. Add that it has a wide streaming release (via iTunes, Amazon Prime, and Shudder) and you have a film that has far outlasted the longevity people expected from it, including its director.

However, while *The Amusement Park* has been preserved, restored, and made available for the general public, the same cannot be said for other industrial films, even those made by well-known filmmakers. *Pittsburgh* is a good example of this – to date, there has been no major release of the film, in any of its forms, on either home video or streaming. Kilcoyne explains that the film negatives have not been “cataloged or stored in an archival manner” and that the most recent release of the film was on a limited-run DVD produced by the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts in 2008. What's more, much of the documentation regarding On Film Inc. and the films they made were destroyed in a fire in the mid-1960s. However, Kilcoyne also notes the admirable job that Pittsburgh Filmmakers had done in preserving the negatives and a 16mm copy of the film, despite their limited resources.¹¹¹ This is sadly no longer the case, as Pittsburgh Filmmakers shuttered in 2019 after merging with Pittsburgh Center for the Arts. What happened to the film items after the merger is unknown – it's doubtful they were destroyed, but what (if any) institution now holds them is unclear. The only other copy of the film that Kilcoyne mentions is a 16mm copy owned by Anthology Film Archives in New York. Anthology Film Archives continues to preserve films (on film) and could do the work on *Pittsburgh* properly.

The fact that *Pittsburgh* has yet to be distributed, even nearly 50 years after the negatives were rediscovered, points to another advantage that *The Amusement Park* had that many other

¹¹¹ Kilcoyne, 86-87

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industrial films did not – an interested viewing public. For better or worse, George A. Romero is a household name compared to Brakhage or Van Dyke, and as such, is more likely to attract potential viewers to a new work by that filmmaker, rediscovered or not.

This leaves us with an uncomfortable truth: that *The Amusement Park* is the exception when it comes to the preservation and restoration of industrial films, not the rule. The fact that the film not only survived, but that there were people dedicated to restoring and assuring the film is available to future generations, is a rarity, one which hopefully will become more common in the future.

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Chronological Filmography of George A. Romero

Features

Expostulations (1962) (lost)

Whine on the Farm (1965) (unproduced)

Night of the Living Dead (1968), Image Ten

There's Always Vanilla (1971), The Latent Image

Jack's Wife (Season of the Witch) (1973), The Latent Image

The Crazies (1973), The Latent Image/Pittsburgh Films

Spasmo (1974), Dir. Umberto Lenzi (Italian giallo film, Romero was hired to shoot extra scenes
for the American release)

Martin (1977), Laurel Productions/Braddock Associates

Dawn of the Dead (1978), Laurel Group

Knightriders (1981), Laurel Entertainment

Creepshow (1982), Laurel Show

Day of the Dead (1985), Laurel Entertainment

Monkey Shines (1988), Orion Pictures

Two Evil Eyes (1990), ADC Films/Gruppo Bema (Co-production with Dario Argento. Directed
the segment "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar")

The Dark Half (1993), Dark Half Productions

Bruiser (2000), Le Studio Canal+/Barenholtz Productions/Romero-Grunwald Productions

Land of the Dead (2005) Atmosphere Entertainment MM/Romero-Grunwald Productions/Wild
Bunch/Rangerkim

Diary of the Dead (2007) Artfire Films/Romero-Grunwald Productions

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Survival of the Dead (2009), Artfire Films/Romero-Grunwald Productions/Devonshire Productions

Television

Mister Roger Neighborhood (1967-1975). Romero directed several Picture-Picture segments for the show. He claimed in interviews he made “about a dozen” such shorts; however, only four episodes are credited as having been made by Latent Image: 1141, 1155, 1156 [aka the tonsillectomy episode], and 1164. All were aired in the spring of 1971.)

The Winners 1973, ABC Television. Series of sports documentaries made for ABC Sports by Laurel. Episodes aired from 1973 to 1975. Eight were directed by Romero, four by Michael Gornick, and one by Richard P. Rubinstein. Episodes directed by Romero are: “Willie Stargell: What If I Didn’t Play Baseball,” “Franco Harris: Good Luck on Sunday,” “Bruno Sammartino: Strong Man,” “Johnny Rutherford: Eleven Year Odyssey,” “Tom Weiskopf: On Tour,” “NFL Films: The 27th Team,” “Reggie Jackson: One Man Wild Bunch,” and “O.J. Simpson: Juice on the Loose” (47 minutes, originally aired December 28, 1974).

Magic at the Roxy 1976 (1-hour tv special co-directed with Mike Gargiulo that was meant to promote David Copperfield. Earliest known airdate May 26, 1976)

Iron City Asskickers 1998 (Unaired 20-minute proof of concept short for a wrestling-themed reality show.)

Commercials/Shorts/Industrial

The Man from the Meteor (1954)

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Gorilla (1956)

Earth Bottom (1956)

Curly (1958)

Slant (1958)

The Calgon Story. Directed by George A. Romero, (1966) (advertisement for Calgon detergent)

The Amusement Park. Directed by George A. Romero (1973)

Jacaranda Joe (1994) (17-minute short made for Valencia College project. Camera Negatives + VHS Workprint of the film exist.)

Biohazard 2 (1997) (30-second Japanese TV ad for the video game *Biohazard 2* [U.S., title *Resident Evil 2*], a series inspired by Romero's work.)

Scream! 2000 (2 minutes, 57-sec music video for the band Misfits)

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Credits for *The Amusement Park*

Original Production

Directed by George A. Romero

Written by Walton Cook

Cast (in order of screen credits)

Lincoln Maazel, Harry Albacker, Phyllis Casterwiler, Pete Chovan, Marion Cook, Walton Cook, Sally Erwin, Michael Gornick, Jack Gottlob, Virginia Greenwald, S. William Hinzman, Bonnie Hinzman, Halem Joseph, Bob Koppler, Sarah Kurtz, Aleen Palmer, Georgia Palmer, Arthur Schwerin, Bill Siebart, Robert Trow, Gabriel Verbick, Jewel Walker

Produced by

Karl Rabeneck, producer

Richard P. Rubinstein, associate producer

Cinematography S. William Hinzman

Film Editing George A. Romero

Sound Michael Gornick

Visual Effects

Jerry Rosso ... graphics

Camera and Electrical Department

Michael Gornick ... additional photography

Simon Manses... grip

Nicholas Mastandrea ... grip

Bill Vanpelt ... grip (as Bill Van Pelt)

Composer Phil Mahoney

Script girl Bonnie Hinzman

Additional Crew

Rex Gleason ... production coordinator

George A. Romero ... ADR loop group (uncredited)

Rubin

Restoration Credits

Produced by

Israel Ehrisman, producer: 4K restoration

Sandra Schulberg, producer: 4K restoration

Sound

Sal Ojeda ... audio restoration: 4K restoration [I would make the restoration credits a separate section altogether.]

Editorial Department

Anastasia Cipolla ... colorist: 4K restoration

Anne-Marie Desjardins ... Kinetta scanner operator: 4K restoration

Oskar Miarka ... colorist: 4K restoration

Yixin Wang ... Kinetta scanner operator: 4K restoration

Additional Crew

Cameron Haffner ... manager: restoration and filmmaker services: 4K restoration

Jeff Kreines ... consultant: Kinetta scanning: 4K restoration

David Leitner ... consultant: Kinetta scanning: 4K restoration

Thanks

Walton Cook ... special thanks: 4K restoration (as Wally Cook)

John Harrison ... special thanks: 4K restoration

Jack Hickey ... special thanks

Chris Jenkins ... special thanks: 4K restoration

Terry Mann ... special thanks: 4K restoration

Harry B. Miller III ... special thanks: 4K restoration

Karl Rabeneck... special thanks: 4K restoration

J.D. Rouette ... special thanks: 4K restoration

Appendix: Interview with Suzanne Desrocher-Romero

The following is a transcript of an interview I conducted with Suzanne Desrocher-Romero via Zoom, January 30, 2023. It has been edited for clarity.

Ben Rubin: What role did you play in the restoration of the film?

SD: Zero. It was restored by Sandra Schulberg and their team [at IndieCollect]. I had everything to do with getting it to her, though, <laugh>, you know.

BR: Was there any oversight on your part to make sure they were doing the job?

SD: Oh, there was definitely oversight...Before George passed away, a very good friend of mine and George's gave us a 16mm of this print and a DVD. And Julia Daniella [the friend] said, "Here's this movie or, uh, short, uh, PSA that he did in 1973." And I went, "Oh, okay." So I took it, and I said to George, "What's this?" He goes, "Ah, it was nothing. It was, um, a thing. Took us three days to shoot bing, bang, boom... 37,000 [dollars] I think was the budget. It was a nothing." So I went, "Okay, well, can I see it? Can we see it together?" And so we did, and it was astonishing. I don't know if you've seen the film, Ben but, but it's astonishing <laugh>.

BR: It is, yeah.

SD: So I was like, "Oh my God, George, I had never even heard you speak of it." And even though there are a few people since who knew about this film, I hadn't. So three, four weeks later, George passes, and I, you know, I'm roaming the halls, and I decide to create the George Romero Foundation, file the paperwork [to establish it]. And then I show this film to Professor Adam Lowenstein at the University of Pittsburgh. And I said, "You know, am I the only one who thinks this is fantastic because, you know, I'd like you to see it." And he had two of his colleagues there, and we watched it, and they reacted the same way I did. They were like, "Oh my God, this is unbelievably fantastic."

I thought, "Well, this ought to be our very first project that we do at the foundation, get this thing restored, and go from there." So I did a bit of shopping around to see who could do it for a reasonable price, because we were a very young foundation, and we didn't have too much money, but we had a little bit. I interviewed Sandra Schulberg, and, you know, she was exactly right for this, for this film. She's a champion of restoring old films, and she was a fan of George Romero. Anyway, it just seemed like she was the right person, so we selected her to do it.

I went there a couple of times to go through it with her and the team. And, you know, the copy we had was horrible <laugh>, it was magenta, it was ripped, it was warped. So I tried to find another copy, and I went to the Lutheran Society, and they didn't have any record of it - they looked in their archive there, there was nothing there. I got an email from a woman in Texas at the University of Texas saying, "Hey, I heard about this amusement park. I have a copy, but it's really pink." I went, "Okay, well, thank you, but that's not gonna work out." So anyway, the team, you know, frame by frame restored the film as best they could, given what they had, which was a terrible copy. As it turns out, there was a third copy, and we tried to use it, but at the end of the day, my 16 was the best one of all of them. So, in a way, it was good that it was the one that they were working on because it was the best copy.

Rubin

BR: Do you know specifically who had the second and third copies of the 16mm?

SD: Tony Buba from Pittsburgh had a copy, and it has since been returned to him. Bonnie Hinzman had a copy, which she donated to us, and we have it, at the Foundation. And this copy [the one Julia gave them] is at the George A. Romero Archive at the University of Pittsburgh.

BR: So the Bonnie Hinzman copy is at the GARF?

SD: Yes.

BR: Do you know what conditions specifically it was kept while, it was held by

SD: By Julia. And she worked for the Torino Film Festival. She was doing a retrospective of George Romero back in the eighties, and had a copy of this film. So she, in fact, at that time, made a copy of it, a DVD copy of the film, which we thought, because that copy that DVD looks great, we assumed that she took a copy of a decent film [print]. But as it turns out, it got faded. It wasn't that it was kept, you know, in a basement with moisture, it wasn't kept in a bad place, it's just that it wasn't kept in a pristine environment. And as you know, Ben, color celluloid just disintegrates eventually. It's just part of the nature of it.

BR: Where is that DVD copy right now?

SD: The DVD that I have. . .

BR: Is it in better condition than the one that's currently commercially available right now? Is it about the same?

SD: No, it's not. It's just different.

I would say that the copy that's out there now on DVD and Blu-Ray is the best copy.

BR: How did Julia obtain the film?

SD: George probably gave it to her. Said "here, you know, this is what I did in '73." But this was before he did *The Crazies* and *Season of The Witch*. I think that was the first film he did in '73.

BR: Was there anything that wasn't fully able to be repaired?

SD: No, I think everything was there. You know, there was just that hint of pink, that magenta there, even though Oscar [one of the colorists] did the best that he could. But, you know, when you look at it, you see a little pink there. But it's actually quite good, considering.

BR: How exactly did Shutter become involved with this? How did it come to their attention, and how did they become the ones to eventually distribute it?

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SD: Well, you know, I'm a friend of Sam Zimmerman, a good acquaintance of him, and I knew that we were restoring the film, and I knew that I would want to get it distributed. So I just casually met with him in New York and said, "Listen, we're in the process of restoring this film, would you be interested in distributing it?" And he said, "Yeah, yes, of course." So we just left it at that. Once the film was restored, I went back to Sam and asked him if he was still interested. And, uh, he basically lowballed me a number, which I didn't like.

I just thought it was worth more than that. I immediately hired agents [at] Yellow Veil, and the boys there said, "Okay, we're very interested in representing this film, but you're gonna have to do chain of title." And I went, "Okay, well, sure, I'll do it." And, uh, my first attempt at finding a chain of title did not go very well, <laugh>. I went back to the agents, and I said to them, "This is what I've got." And they basically said, "Well, it's not enough. We need all your ducks in a row." And I said, "Well, everybody's dead, and nobody's kept any records." So I'm at a loss as to how I'm gonna get ahold of this. So then I hired Lawyers <laugh>, and they held my hand inch by inch, step by step.

We went through everything. We went through the writer, the producers, the Pitcairn, Lutheran, we asked them to sign off on, even though they never, Pitcairn was the only one of all of the folks who had a copy, a, a record of having given I think \$10,000 to the church. Uh, and so, yeah, so it was, it was really painstaking. We, we had to go through all of it in order to, uh, get chain of title, and we finally did. So now we had chain of title, and then I went out and said, anybody interested? And, uh, there were, of course, many interests, but they really weren't ready to give me what I wanted. And then Shutter came back with an offer that I thought was worthy of the film. And so I said, okay, let's, let's, let's do it. So, and you know, and I, I could not have been happier because Shutter is a super duper supporter of George Romero. I love the idea that their young demographic, their fan base, you know, would be introduced to, uh, this film in, in their streaming service. I just thought they were going to be the best thing for this film, and so it worked out beautifully.

BR: You wouldn't happen to have any documentation on the chain of custody? Like who owned the copyright for it, that sort of thing.

SD: Nobody really owned the copyright because there was no copyright registered. I mean, I think Yellow Veil would have all of that stuff.

BR: I know you said you went through everybody who was at least partially involved with the film for a chain of custody. Did that include Richard P. Rubenstein?

SD: It did, even though he really wasn't a producer on the film. We're not quite sure why his name is there. He agrees that his name shouldn't be there, but his name is there, and, uh, so, you know, we asked him to sign off on it, and he did, he was more than happy to do so. But he had nothing to do with the film.

BR: Were any of the people you contacted involved in the restoration?

SD: No.

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BR: Did the Service Society ever officially say why they didn't try to distribute or market the film?

SD: Well, it wasn't really made to market. It was really made so that they could show it to their community centers and, you know, drum up some excitement and some passion about helping the elderly with programs like Meals on Wheels and, you know, all these programs that they were trying to get people to support because there was a need. And so this was, like I said, a public service announcement where they just paid their money to get a small film out there so that they could show their community.

BR: How widely distributed was the film?

SD: It wasn't distributed at all. I'm not quite sure if they even made a copy of the film. Like I said, this woman at the University of Texas had a copy.

BR: How did she get it?

SD: She has no idea. It was in her archive. Tony Buba is a filmmaker, a documentarian, that lives in Pittsburgh. [He] worked on George's films. Again, a good friend of George's and a supporter of the foundation as well.

BR: While I was doing research, looking over some of the documents that the University of Pittsburgh had, one of the things - this was actually also included as a bonus feature on the DVD - was like sort of a pamphlet, advertising it. It mentioned that there was a 26-minute version of the film. Do you know anything about that? If there was any difference?

SD: I don't have it. Don't know of it.

BR: If there was a brochure or a flyer for it, would that have been just for the Lutheran Church community? or for wider distribution?

SD: I think that those brochures were after the fact actually. I'm not quite sure about the timing of those brochures. It was never meant to be marketed -- that I do know.

BR: I'm just trying to get the timeline down. The film was made in '73. It wasn't really marketed, for whatever reason, until around 1975. I know that it was screened at a film festival. I do have some documentation of a letter from the American Film Festival saying "We received your film."

SD: The brochure probably would've been made for that sort of thing. But it was not made by the Lutheran Society. They didn't produce these. It might have been the company, Pittsburgh Communicators. They may have done it.

BR: I've been having trouble finding information on them. Who were they? Do they still exist?

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SD: No. And, and I'm trying to remember his name. He's on the DVD as a credit. [Producer Karl Rabeneck]

He was very helpful because he was actually *the* producer of this film, and, yeah, I just don't have his name off the tip of my tongue. I have <laugh>. I - I have so much, so much going on that I've eliminated it from my files in my brain.

BR: How much funding do you think came from the Lutheran Society?

SD: Pitcairn-Crabbe donated ten thousand dollars. So they came up with 27,000.

BR: Who exactly are Pitcairn-Crabbe?

SD: They're a foundation. They were the only ones who had a record [of the film existing]. I'm not quite sure what they do, but they didn't directly give money to the film. What they did was they gave money to the church, and it was the producer and his wife who were at this church, and that's where they got the money.

BR: I think I know who you're talking about now because I have, um, this was also one of the documents. It was an email that was a correspondence between the two of you that somehow ended up in the documents.

SD: He was in Ohio and ...

BR: He mentioned, in the letter doing a historical reenactment on Lake Erie?

SD: Yeah. And he now lives with his son in Texas. I tried to reach out to him about a month ago, two months ago, and left a message, but I hadn't heard back. But he's literally the guy who did the producing of this film.

BR: He was like living in Florida at the time, I think?

SD: Yep. He had a house there. Then he sold the house and then, uh, sold his Erie condo and then now is living with his son.

BR: Do you think you could give me his contact info?

SD: He hasn't communicated with me. I don't think he wants to be communicated with...

BR: When the Torino Film Festival first got the film, did they have any idea that this was a really rare film? Not a lot of people have seen it. Because he did mention that it was probably George that gave it to Julia.

SD: Yeah. No, I think that they just wanted to have everything that George made, and they had a copy of it. So he gave it to her, and she subsequently made a DVD out of it. You know, one point, Arrow -- or someone in London -- was showing the film in New York, and we had to write

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a cease and desist because they were showing a film they had no right to show. And we were wondering how they got a copy of it, and it was probably that DVD that was made in Torino.

Ben: So, as far as you know, outside of the DVD copy, there are three copies.

SD: As far as I know. I bet you there are more, but that's all I know of.

BR: There was another film that you were working on, a silent film that George had before *Night of The Living Dead*.

SD: It's called "Romero's Elegy." It's 23 minutes, and we are in the middle of a campaign to add music to it. George filmed it in 1965, and his intention was to add music to it. But things got busy for him. He started making commercials and started making some money, and they were picking up enough money to buy equipment so that he could make a movie called *Night of the Living Dead* in '68.

BR: Other than those, I know they recently rediscovered something called *Jacaranda Joe*. They screened that a few months ago at the Association of Moving Image Archivists conference. Do you know of any other short films -- not commercials, but industrial films -- George made?

SD: No, I think that's it. Somebody told me about a glass-blowing film that George did. I have not seen it. It's going to be sent to me, but I haven't seen it. I don't know if anybody knows of it, so I'm anxious to see what it is.

BR: One last question. I know that there were some rights issues regarding the music to the film. Do you think you could elaborate on that?

SD: Part of getting all the ducks in a row was to make sure that every piece of music was licensed so that we could show the film and have it distributed. There was one piece that we could not find - we have no idea where he got this piece of music. We asked Mike Gornick, who was involved in the picture. We asked a friend of mine who's really a big music library connoisseur, and a big connoisseur of George's movies and [the] music to his movies. Couldn't identify the piece. So we basically went to DeWolfe [a prominent music library] and said, "Well, we're looking for, you know, we need to cover [a piece of music]." I think it was literally 45, 48 seconds. We picked a piece that was somewhat similar to what George had used, and...I really didn't want to change any of it at all. I wanted to, you know, get that film exactly how he produced it, but this 45 seconds of music, I just couldn't find it. We ended up putting another piece in there, and it's very close. I mean, it was seamless. You'd never know it wasn't the original.

BR: Do you have any pictures of the condition the film was in when it first arrived at yours and George's place?

SD: No. It was on a reel, in a tin can.

Rubin

I brought it to Sandra and put it on her desk and said, “We need to restore this.” So I never actually saw the film. They processed it to see how damaged it was. It going to be a lot of work, but they didn't seem discouraged at all. They said, “It's all doable.”

BR: How did Tony Buba come across his copy of the film?

SD: I think he picked it up at a flea market or something.

BR: Really?

SD: Yeah. It was an inadvertent, absolutely serendipitous discovery, and he totally snagged it as soon as he saw it. And Sandra and Tony are colleagues and friends, and they've known each other for a long, long time. It was a family type of thing. He was very generous. He said, “Here's my copy.” And we looked at it, and IndieCollect said, “Yeah, nah, hers is best so far.” Mine wasn't great, but it was the best one.

BR: Okay. Then, uh, I think that should be it. Uh, thank you again so much for doing this for me

SD: You're welcome. My pleasure.

BR: You provided a lot of good information. If I do have like an extra question or two that comes up, uh, while I'm still doing research. I will be sure to send you a copy of the thesis when it's completed.

SD: Oh, that would be wonderful. And then we'll put it in the archive. We would love that.