

A PINEWOOD DIALOGUE WITH GEORGE A. ROMERO

As a teenager growing up in the Bronx, George A. Romero was arrested for hurling a flaming dummy off a roof while filming his 8mm epic *The Man from the Meteor*. Always a resourceful provocateur, Romero virtually invented the independent horror movement with his ultra-low-budget zombie film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Having lived and worked in Pittsburgh since the 1960s, Romero is a true maverick, making funny, scary, thoughtful films outside of the Hollywood system. He spoke on the opening day of a Moving Image retrospective of his films.

A Pinewood Dialogue following a screening of *Night of the Living Dead*, moderated by Giulia D'Agnolo Vallan, director of the Torino Film Festival (January 11, 2003):

GIULIA D'AGNOLO VALLAN: Help me welcome George Romero. (Applause)

ROMERO: Thank you. I don't think we really broke ground that way. I don't think we paved the way for other filmmakers. I think there were, coincidentally, a lot of filmmakers during that period—that five- or seven-year period—that were making films that were inspired by what was going on in the world, by a little bit of that anger. And I think we all took different approaches; I don't think any of us were... I think John Carpenter is probably more of a granddaddy to other films that came after than I ever was. I think we were all interested in using the genre to express ourselves, not just to tell a little scary story. Certainly Tobe [Hooper] or Wes's [Craven] early stuff. There were a lot of people that came out around the same time. I don't know that any of us influenced any of the others.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: Do you see any of the younger horror filmmakers using the genre in the way you guys used it at the time, which was really innovative and very revolutionary?

ROMERO: I haven't seen much lately that—of course, I don't get to see everything—but no, I haven't seen it being used that way. It seems that these days, it's either eye candy or a lot of special effects. I don't know. It seems, maybe since 9/11, the producers have gone back to more gothic stuff.

It's a little less human-on-human. It's not *Scream* anymore, it's more things like the *Signs* and *The Others*. I think they're trying to find another way to scare people. *The Ring*. But none of that stuff, none of it seems to have any sort of, really, underbelly of social criticism or satire that way. Most of the satire is sort of self-referential to the genre, which I don't like too much.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: How would you describe the way that underbelly, the social criticism you just made [reference to], evolved in the *Dead* trilogy—first with *Dawn of the Dead*, which they will see tomorrow, and then in *Day of the Dead*?

ROMERO: Well, I think it got more and more self-conscious with each film. (Laughs) It's pretty hard to go back to the innocence. The first film [*Night of the Living Dead*]—we were able to sort of talk about it, and we were living in that farmhouse, and sitting around going, “Hey...” (Laughter) You know, basically, the film was innocent; we were able to forget that and go make the movie. With the second film—people say, with *Dawn of the Dead*, “There's this thing hidden underneath about consumerism.” Hidden? Give me a break! (Laughter) It's like a pie in the face! So in that sense, whatever social criticism there was [was] more conscious—and in many cases, I think, even more self-conscious. We were worried about it more. You don't write a line without thinking, “What am I saying here, exactly?” So that's what I mean by being self-conscious. *Day* [was] the same way. I had this conceit for a while that we were doing them in—we did them in different decades: the sixties, seventies, and the eighties, and I thought

that I was trying to make the outward personalities of the film reflect those decades and also the sort of mindset. You know, *Dawn of the Dead* is a disco party, comic book. And in the eighties, when the rich were living upstairs and everybody was down in the cellar someplace. So I think it reflects that. You know, I don't think of them as sequels per se; they're just—they're films that use a similar theme and that reflect the times in which they were made and try to have a good time with the same monsters, my old buds.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: Now, you have a fourth *Dead* film, which I'm sure everybody wants to hear about. What would it reflect about our times?

ROMERO: Well, the funny thing is, I had finished the script before 9/11. And then I said, "Oops. I don't think this is exactly right." I don't know yet whether this is going to happen or not. Everybody keeps saying, "Are you doing *Twilight of the Dead*, or what?" (Laughter) There basically is no deal on it yet, but I have been working on a script, and I have been trying to change it, since 9/11, because I didn't think it was quite pertinent. It was completely about ignoring the problem. It seemed like before 9/11, that's what we were doing. And my idea was that the dead would be homeless, like the homeless. People got used to them, got used to stepping over them on the way to dinner. That was going to be the idea, basically—ignoring them and trying to live around them. Then, after 9/11, I think now we're sort of coming back to ignoring the problem again, but in a different way—sort of like living in an earthquake zone.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: Later on, George will be introducing *Tales of Hoffmann*, which is one of his favorite films. He is known for being a horror filmmaker, and yet the films he always mentions as the films that were really important for his life are not necessarily horror. One is *Tales*, another one is *The Thing from Another World*, and the other one is *The Quiet Man*. I want to ask George, what is it about these three films that were so important for him in his youth, when he was growing up in New York?

ROMERO: Well, they were among the first films I was allowed to go see *alone*, with my own fifty cents. And I was just always in love with movies. Those three, particularly, just had an effect on me. I love

[John] Ford. *The Quiet Man* turned me on to Ford. I was allowed to go see *The Quiet Man*. I grew up in a Catholic family, and everybody was with *The Quiet Man*—they said a Hail Mary in that movie. It turned me on to Ford, that film, and turned me on to the Duke, as well. I had very mixed tastes. I just liked movies. And I thought that was just a particularly terrific movie.

The Thing was probably, at the time, the scariest thing that I'd ever seen. Scariest *Thing* I'd ever seen! But also, at the same time, just right around the time that *The Thing* came out—at the RKO Castle Hill and all neighborhood theaters around—I was able to go see the big, universal monsters of filmland, [on the] *big-screen*. I don't know how many people here have ever seen those movies big-screen. They're gorgeous! So, that turned me on, too, that sort of classical—little more classical style. But *The Thing*, I thought, was really scary. And it was the first one that scared me—sitting there in my seat—and got to me.

And *Tales of Hoffmann* is an opera. It's just a beauty. Michael Powell—that film turned me on to Michael Powell. I had an aunt and uncle who took me to see *Tales of Hoffmann* when it first played in theaters in Manhattan. It's a fantasy film. And so I was able—I related to it on that level. But I also—it turned me on to classical [music], it turned me on to opera. I was just so impressed with that film. Michael Powell was working with not very much money and certainly no visual-effects capability or budget, and was able to do things just with very simple in-camera tricks that were transparent. You could see: "Oh, that's how they did that; they just double-printed that," or "They played it in reverse motion." And I think that being able to see through those tricks gave me a little bit of confidence in an ability to go out and try to really understand the medium. In other words, it wasn't this blow-away thing that was unachievable. And so, I loved it for that. But I also just loved the design of that film, and his use of color, and the characters. And of course, it was a fantasy. Robert Helpmann is the best Dracula that ever was, I think. So, I hope those of you who've never seen [it] get a real treat—see it big.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: George, you grew up in New York and you started making films here. Well, you started when you were really little with an 8mm

camera, and then a 16mm. And then you went to Pittsburgh. Can you tell us what brought you to Pittsburgh, and what made you really decide to make films?

ROMERO: Well, I always loved film, but I always thought you had to be sort of born royalty to get involved in it. At the time, there were no schools that had any hardware. My dad was a commercial artist, and so I went to Pittsburgh to study painting and design at Carnegie Mellon (Carnegie Tech then). And they had a theater department, so after three years of trying to paint, I transferred over to the theater department and got another little sort of whiff of the greasepaint, or whatever you call it. A bunch of us got together and made a little film, which never went anywhere. We never put a [sound]track on it. But we actually finished the two-hour flick. It was an anthology—five stories with a wrap-around—called *Expostulations*. I think there may be a couple of clips from it on one of the reels that they're going to show. And in looking around for people who might be able to put a soundtrack on that, we met some musicians and some audio guys in Pittsburgh, and we all started to hang out.

At the time, cities the size of Pittsburgh had film laboratories, because there was no such thing as tape. News was on film. And one of the first jobs—it wasn't even really a job; they gave me a cup of coffee and a few nickels here and there... But it was bicycling. They'd shoot the news film, bring it in, and these guys—smoking cigarettes over the splicing glue—would cut together these news stories, all single-system. I'd take the bicycle and run this stuff around. (I say bicycling; it wasn't, literally, because the stations were all right there in town at this time.) And that's how I learned: from these *guys*, you know? These guys down in the cellar of this place that were just living on the fumes of the glue! But that's where, really, I learned how to use the pencil, how to synchronize sound with picture, and do all that.

So then, we kept pushing at it, and we finally bought some bigger equipment—16mm, all 16mm. But the labs in those days—labs there did 16mm, 35mm. They were full-service labs, with sound stages, mixing stages, everything. We were able to make *Night of the Living Dead* because we started to make commercials. We called ourselves a “commercial production company.” At the time,

commercials were all live, you know: guys, between the innings of the ballgame, drinking—actually drinking beer, when that was allowed! We were the first company to do commercials on film. We had a good success for two or three years and wound up then buying more equipment—bought some 35mm—and then we went broke! (Laughs) But we were able to make *Night of the Living Dead* with... And keep going. Made three or four more films before I met my partner here, Richard Rubenstein. He made me get serious. (Laughs) We did some television for a while, before we went back to doing another feature. It was with Richard that I did *Martin* and all the things after that, up through *Day*.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) You make a very effective use of claustrophobia in *Night of the Living Dead*. You do not use it the same way in *Dawn of the Dead*. In *Day*, did you want to go back to recuperate that feeling?

ROMERO: I didn't think too much directly about that. It was more about the themes. The mall is a mall; just a different environment. And that was so overwhelming that I wasn't really focused or concentrated at all about, Well, this is going to be less claustrophobic, and then the next one will be claustrophobic again. In that one, I was just more concerned with the idea of being forced to live underground in order to escape the craziness.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) Question is, do you find that people tend to over-analyze your films and find things in them that you really weren't aware of putting in?

ROMERO: I think there's no question about that. (Laughs) Absolutely. As I said, most of the message stuff—particularly in the second two or—to me, it's pretty obvious. It's right in your face. The other stuff that people read into it—sometimes it's astonishing to me. I've read treatises about all the little details. And if it's there, it's completely subconscious. Sometimes that happens. You make choices for one reason or another—whether it's choosing an angle...or everything! Casting—the whole thing. You make choices based on something, but it's usually instinctive and usually pretty much on the fly. As long as you have your idea, the core of your idea, locked in your head, you just have to trust yourself to make all of the other little decisions that go along with it.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question)
The question was pertinent to George's technique from the shooting and editing, and its craft.

ROMERO: And he asked about digital, whether I'm into digital or the new technologies, and all that. I'm not attracted to it just for the sake of what it is. In *Bruiser*, we used probably—well, [for *The Dark Half*, I guess, we used a good bit of CG stuff, but that was before great programs were developed, and it doesn't look very good. A couple of the guys that were working on it were not too wonderful. In *Bruiser*, we used it. I used it almost incidentally to make bats fly through a scene or to do things that, just not obviously, affect scenes. Not, obviously, scenes that require special effects, but just for enhancement. Make the sky look better, or things like that, and little storytelling points. There's a scene in *Bruiser* where there's a boy—it's actually my son—pointing a trident fork to pick out victims at this party. And it just never read. So we went in and put a beam of light on it. I have to say, I was amazed. When you see that footage, you won't believe that it wasn't really a light. These guys were great. I love being able to do things like that. I'm not that interested in doing a big effects picture. I don't wake up in the morning and say, "God, I can make the Loch Ness monster, now that we can do it well!" (Laughs)

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question)
Do you have a favorite modern-day horror movie?

ROMERO: Modern-day meaning how recent? Last five years? I don't know. Boy. Favorite? I'm not too blown away. I like John's [Carpenter] stuff. I just haven't been really excited. But I liked *Signs*, actually. I know you didn't, but I liked it. I thought he sort of went back to basics with it, and it was things that go bump in the night. I actually saw some similarities to *Night [of the Living Dead]*. This thing—the aliens have invaded the world, and we're looking at it from a farmhouse. I liked that. I liked *Candyman*. Well, I loved *They Live*. (I don't know if that's going back too far!) (Applause) But every once in a while, you know, something comes along and you go, "Yo!" But not too often.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question)
It's a two-part question. One pertains to *Day of the Dead*. George initially wrote the script for a much bigger-budgeted film, and then he was forced to

cut it almost in half. So he's asking what the film would have been like in case you had the original budget. And the second part of the question relates to *Night of the Living Dead*. He's saying that at the end of the film he saw the equivalent of a lynching—it reminded him very much of a lynching—and he is asking George if that was intended, or is that something that he [the audience member] projected on[to] the film?

ROMERO: Well, the second question first. I do think that I was influenced a little bit by my work at those labs in the news stations. But it was also 1968. It was a very angry time. And so, those attitudes, I'm sure, crept in—that whole thing of the guys coming across the field. Then we went to those grainy, sort of almost press-like photographs. We couldn't figure out how to make them actually litho, so we just put this grain over them. So, definitely, that was the idea. This guy gets gunned down by a posse. You know, zombies are just doing what comes natural. (Laughter)

I had written a bigger script; it just would've cost more money. The attitude, the basic themes in it were the same, but we showed more. There was another society—there was an upper class sort of living up top. And there were corrals—well, bigger corrals for the zombies. It was just a bigger film, with boat action and a lot more action scenes. But thematically, it stayed the same. But at the time, UATC [United Artists Theater Circuit, Inc.], the people that financed it (United Film), said to Richard, my partner, "Hey, we'll..." It budgeted out at around seven million, I think. And they said, "Okay, we can—we'll do this for seven million, but you got to deliver it as an R rating. And if you're willing to work with three million, we'll put it out unrated." So, we decided to rewrite, and just shave it down. That's what happened.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: Just to stay on this subject, George had a version of *Martin* which was actually 2 hours and 45 minutes long, and it's a version he really liked. What was that like? Give us a brief idea.

ROMERO: What was that version of *Martin* like? Again, it was longer, and it had much more narration; it had much more—it was just much more of an exploration. If anyone has ever seen the book, the novelization of *Martin*, it was much more like that. Again: thematically, very much the same,

but we tried to cut it down to size. I just wish there was one existing 16mm black-and-white print of that; that I wish I still had. But I got together, actually, with Ben Barenholtz, who was going to distribute that film, and we sat in the cutting room, and he gave me his opinions about it, and we worked on it together. He's got a pretty good eye for where it's fat, and I cut it down to something. I always like it longer. I never think that a film is long enough.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) How do you feel about the vast influence that *Dawn of the Dead* had on the Italian horrors [horror movies] of the seventies—films by Dario Argento or Lucio Fulci? Do you like those films?

ROMERO: Well, Dario was around—Dario was the first money in to produce *Dawn of the Dead*. So he's been around long before that. There were some films that really seemed to use the idea—the same kind of zombies—and just used that phenomenon for whatever the filmmaker's own reasons were. And I like a couple of the Fulci films. I don't pay a lot of attention to it, I have to say. I'm not a student of the genre that way. My zombies are, you know...my zombies are guys that—they're Steeler fans, man. (Laughter)

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) Well, he's asking about the different versions that *Night of the Living Dead* had—the 1990 version (the remake), and then the special edition—and why there are these different versions. George, can you illustrate that complicated problem?

ROMERO: Well, yeah. The remake was basically a copyright issue. We lost the copyright on the original *Night of the Living Dead*. When we first finished the film, we printed it and made a handsome print at one of those labs, we threw it in the car, and brought it to New York to look for somebody to show it. And our title was *Night of the Flesh Eaters*. When Walter Reade [theaters] finally picked up the film, they changed it, and *Night of the Living Dead* was *their* title. We naïvely had our copyright notice on that—on, literally, the title card, the overprint—that it was the title of the film. When they changed the title, they never noticed that; they also took the copyright off the film. And it was our fault; we should've put it down where it belonged. After three or four years, people realized that there

was no copyright on that film. We fought it for years in Washington. We were never able to get the copyright back on it. That's why there were so many unauthorized copies. Everybody that realized that it was basically public domain was making copies of it. So the company, Image Ten—the original group of people that made the first film—said, "We got to try to protect ourselves. Let's do a remake." And that really was the reason for the remake. So I went along with it, and wrote it, and I think Tom did a good job directing it. But it wasn't anybody's desire to go remake the movie. As far as the thirtieth anniversary edition, I didn't have anything to do with that. I just thought that was a bad exercise.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) There has been talk about remaking *Dawn of the Dead*, and have you been contacted about directing? And what are your thoughts on it?

ROMERO: No, I wasn't contacted, but it's Richard, it's my partner at the time. He's got the right to do it. And, you know, I wish him a lot of luck. I think they're going to take a different approach with it, from what I've heard. I don't know anything about what's going on with it.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) He was asking if there is a widescreen version of *Night of the Living Dead*, or if it was actually intended for the format you saw, which was 1.33:1.

ROMERO: Video companies and DVD companies, they keep looking for ways to make it different and new and so you guys will all buy another copy. I can't tell you how many director's cuts I've seen of my stuff when I never did a director's cut. There have been a couple of legitimate things. Anchor Bay [Entertainment] is pretty good about it. They actually found footage and they actually found new material. A couple of those copies were legitimately expanded. But half the time, they'll say "Widescreen Version." Well, when it's not shot widescreen, it doesn't make any sense, does it? It's like colorizing *Night of the Living Dead*.

(Responds to audience question) The original *Night of the Living Dead*? That's all library music. It was literally the Capital Hi-Q Film Score Library that we lifted. Needle drops. You pay so much per needle drop. And so, that music can be heard on a million

other movies, if you listen carefully. (Laughter) I never met the cats that played it, so I don't know how many there were. (Laughter)

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) The question is, how did he get to cast John Amplas in *Martin*, as the lead character in *Martin*?

ROMERO: Oh, *There's Always Vanilla*. It was a script written by another friend of ours, somebody in the group, and it was never finished, and we were getting pages every once in a while and... So we wound up shoot... If anyone has ever seen this, we're talking about a film called *There's Always Vanilla*, aka *The Affair*—I don't know how many other titles it had. So we wound up shooting those narrative pieces with Ray[mond Laine], in order to try to glue it—make a little sense out of the story. But I enjoyed—there were days that I really enjoyed shooting it. It's too bad that it hasn't been seen more, just for the sake of everybody that worked on it.

Casting John was—I had written the script, and really, the only actor that I had in mind was my wife Christine [Forrest]. I saw John in a play in Pittsburgh, and he was just—he was magic in the play. He had to do a little bit of mime, a lot of movement, and he had to have that sort of shy, sullen—just exactly what we needed. It was right there on a platter. John Amplas is also the mime in *Knightriders*; he just has this magical quality.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: When you're given a chance, you single out two other films that are your favorites: one is *Martin*, and one is *Knightriders*. Why are those two films closer to your heart than others?

ROMERO: So much of why you have a favorite piece of your own work has—I think there are probably more than two, but—two major components to it. One is how successful you think you were in translating your idea or what you originally had on the page, and how successful you were in being able to do that. Forget whether the film is successful, whether it works, whether it plays to an audience. You have this internal feeling about, Well, this is what I set out to do, and that's pretty close. Having nothing to do, as I say, with whether it works for anybody else. And that affects yourself.

The other part of it is the experience of making the film, which you cannot separate from the film itself. So *Martin* and *Knightriders* were both—man, we were just a family. And we were fighting the dragon. Those productions were difficult productions. I can't say we had a “wonderful time,” but we had this feeling of camaraderie, of everybody working towards the same goal. I haven't experienced that again—until *Bruiser*. I have the same feeling about *Bruiser*. And so now *Bruiser*—I have it right up there with the other ones as one of my faves, because whether people get it or not doesn't matter. I think it's successful to what was on the page, and we had the best time. There wasn't a bad apple in the bunch. We just had a great time doing it. And I think those two things come in—and that's what makes your favorite.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) He's asking about George's collaboration with special-effect artist Tom Savini: how they met and how they work together when they do special effects.

ROMERO: It's funny. Way before even *Night of the Living Dead*—when we first started to get serious about trying to make movies and started to buy equipment (with our spare money!)—we were going to make a little drama about two young kids, medieval. We were trying to do Bergman—*Virgin Spring*, or something like that. So we needed two young teenagers. And what we did was, we went around to high schools to look at high-school plays. Tom Savini was in one of those plays, and he was the best male actor that we saw. So, we talked to him, we got together, we hung out a little bit. Of course, that film never got made; plans fell apart. Tom took off and was actually a combat photographer in 'Nam. And one day we were planning *Martin*—we were already planning it; Richard had already put the financing together and we were planning it... Tom walks off the elevator one day—he knew we were doing this. And he says, “George, watch this!” (Holds up his arm) Slashed it open, right there in front of all of us! (Laughs) And that's the kind of guy he is, you know? He's just...

So, what it's like on the set—the second part of the question—is that Tom is very inventive. He's like this *force*. And he loves it when there's a problem.

When John Harrison takes a screwdriver in the ear in *Dawn*, it was to cover a continuity error, because we had this guy with a jacket—Scotty [Scott H. Reiniger] had a jacket around his waist, and then he didn't, so we needed to have him lose the jacket! (Laughter) So we said, "Well, we'll have a zombie grab him." "But, well, then we have to kill the zombie." And it became one of the most memorable moments in the thing! (Laughs)

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) The editing in *Dawn of the Dead* is spectacular, and editing seems one of the essential ingredients of success with the first two films. Why didn't you edit *Day of the Dead*?

ROMERO: I had already started to work with Pat [Pasquale Buba]. I love editing. If I were starting over, I might decide to just be an editor. It's my favorite part of the process. Everybody goes home (Laughs) and you're left alone with all the stuff! There're no politics in that room, except when the producers come around and want to see a screening. I can't say that about my current partner and, actually, Richard. It's been wonderful working with both of these guys and—I'm talking about the suits. My AD Nicky [Nick Mastrandrea] calls them "the pinecones." When they come around...

You can't do it—the answer to why I don't do it [edit] anymore is: you can't. The pinecones want the film the day after it's shot. So, you can't do it. But I had also, gradually, over the course of several films, developed a really good relationship with Pasquale. Once you have that relationship, once you can shorthand—communicate in shorthand—it's a lot easier to work with somebody. I used to always be reluctant to sort of give it up: "What's this guy going to do?" But then, on *Creepshow*, we had a bunch of different editors, so I was going around from room to room. Paul Hirsch cut the crate—an Oscar dude. So, I lost some of my inhibitions, and I also learned how to trust people. And working with Pat is like working with a brother. Maybe easier. (Laughs) Probably.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) It's about *Night of the Living Dead*, and about how, for being a very simple film, it didn't overplay most of the conventions of the genre. It didn't accentuate the fact that it had a black lead in a Gary Cooper role; it didn't accentuate... There is no exploitation

of women. You really played it for the blue-collar audience. Is that intended?

ROMERO: Yeah, we didn't make it for a blue-collar audience. I just said that I always thought that zombies were the blue-collar monsters. They were the working Joes of the monster class (or the "Monster Mash"!). I guess we just were not—we weren't thinking that way. We were thinking more thematically. We were thinking, Well, this is a revolution; this is about a revolution. That's about as deep as we got into that. The new society literally devouring the old. And we spoke about the concepts of family and religion and communication systems, all of those things falling apart. We talked a lot about that. But we weren't out to do an exploitation film, in that sense. We didn't want the zombies carrying off some—[the character] Judy, with her trench coat torn open. That wasn't in our minds; that's not what we were doing. We were trying to do a realistic story about what would happen if people got trapped in this situation in a farmhouse. And if they could talk to each other, they could get out of there; if they would just make the right move, they could get out of there; if they just *spoke!* "There's a *car*—she has a *car!*" Instead, it's this lack of communication, and anger and one-upmanship, that gets between them. And that, for us, was much more what the story was about. Where we tried to push the envelope was in the scares and, obviously, in the banquet scene... (Laughs)

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) How did living in Pittsburgh and staying in Pittsburgh, deciding to stay there, affect your work?

ROMERO: I don't know if it's had any real effect. It's maybe kept out some static. A lot of my friends that have moved either to the coast—well, mostly to the West Coast—are... You live and breathe the stuff. And I think there are a lot of influences—subconscious, unconscious influences—on you: "Well, this is the stock that everybody is using now." "There's this new kind of smoke, man, that really makes it look great." There's a lot of that that you avoid by being away from it. And I haven't needed to be [in Hollywood]. My partner's here in New York, Peter [Grunwald], and our agent's in L.A. and I don't need to be there; so I'd just as soon stay away. Plus, we, my wife and I, have a couple of kids, and Pittsburgh's a much better place for

them. So, I've just stayed around. I also fell in love with it. I grew up in New York and I fled. I never knew about Manhattan; I was a Bronx kid. This [Manhattan] was enemy territory. Well, not here [in Queens], not here, but over there, that was enemy territory. I fled before I even knew what New York was about. I got to Pittsburgh and I saw some sky. When I grew up, you'd hear an airplane for five minutes and see it for about a second, and then you'd hear it going away for five minutes. Pittsburgh—I just fell in love with it, and I still love it. It's a great city. It's really a great city. Not many people realize, but it's a wonderful place. And it's a very real place. It's very friendly, and there's still a lot of that old, industrial "Let's get this job done, man." (Laughs)

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) In 1968, how did it play to audiences, the scene in *Night of the Living Dead* where they take all the corpses out of the pickup truck? It must've been really new to the audiences then.

ROMERO: Yeah, they pretty much went, "Eeeww!" I don't think anybody thought of it as part of the message or anything; it was a gross-out. And it was partly meant to be. Then again, when I was talking about with the other films, how they got a little more self-conscious—I have this justification in my mind for why those sequences belong: because it's a wake-up call. The film is a kind of a romp, comic book, whatever the personality of the individual piece is. And then, all of a sudden, you get one of these scenes, and it's cold water in the face. I dug that in *M*A*S*H*, for example, where you're howling, and then all of a sudden you go into that operating room and there's blood squirting all over the place, and it's just like, "Holy Jesus." And so that's really what I was trying to do with those scenes. I don't think anyone saw them that way when it first came out. It's also much easier to take in black and white. (Laughs) Maybe not. Actually, in *Dawn*, I think, the red is so red, and it looks kind of fake.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: Yeah, you've said that real blood, for you, is blood in black and white.

ROMERO: Yeah. Well, I grew up with blood being in black and white. Wherever you saw it on the news—or [Marlon] Brando in *On the Waterfront*,

when they beat him up. That's real blood, man! Ours was chocolate syrup, however.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) What happened? You were supposed to direct the *Resident Evil* movie.

ROMERO: They didn't like what I did, basically. Peter and I worked on it intensely for—oh, gosh, I don't know—ten months, something like that. And it was one of those typical situations where you work with an executive who doesn't have "yes" power, and he's loving everything and saying, "Oh, this is great, man. We're going to push this through, and this is great, the boys upstairs are going to love this!" And then, finally, you show it to the boss, and he says, "What's this? This isn't what I wanted." I can't tell you how many times that has happened. I mean, Peter and I had a housekeeping deal at New Line for two years, where they just basically paid us big bucks, gave us an office, and they kept saying, "What do you want us to buy for you?" So, we actually asked them to buy a few properties for us. And they would buy them—the execs would buy them—and they'd actually commission scripts to be written on them. Then you'd wind up in Bob [Robert] Shaye's office, and he would say, "Who bought this?" I mean, there's no communication. And sometimes deals fall apart just simply because of that kind of stupidity.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: This was right after [*The Dark Half*, right?

ROMERO: Right after *Dark Half*, yeah. (Laughter)

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: Would you say how the beautiful music box found its way into *Night of the Living Dead*?

ROMERO: It was at the house. (Laughter) Happy accident, you know? There are so many of those. I mean, that happens a lot, you know.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: (Repeats audience question) Is the house [from *Night of the Living Dead*] still there?

ROMERO: No. The only reason we got to use it was because they were going to tear it down. So they let us mess it up.

D'AGNOLO VALLAN: Well, I'd like to thank you,
George Romero. (Applause)

ROMERO: Thank you, thank you all! Thank you.

The Pinewood Dialogues, an ongoing series of discussions with key creative figures in film, television, and digital media, are made possible with a generous grant from the Pannonia Foundation.

Museum of the Moving Image is grateful for the generous support of numerous corporations, foundations, and individuals. The Museum receives vital funding from the City of New York through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Economic Development Corporation. Additional government support is provided by the New York State Council on the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Natural Heritage Trust (administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation). The Museum occupies a building owned by the City of New York, and wishes to acknowledge the leadership and assistance of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Queens Borough President Helen M. Marshall, and City Council Member Eric N. Gioia.

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