

UK brains under threat?

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The British appetite for zombies is becoming a growing trend. From computer games and films to organised zombie walks through Britain's cities, the proliferation of zombies seems to be everywhere. Yet, this high interest in zombies enables researchers to link zombie-like behaviours to current models of public attitudes and actions.

Researcher Dr Nick Pearce will present findings from his new study of Britain's zombie phenomenon at an event organised as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Festival of Social Science 2011. The event will be an interactive talk on the metaphor of the zombie in everyday life, followed by a screening of the first ever zombie film, *White Zombie* (1932).

"Zombies are very now," Dr Pearce points out, "but what's really interesting and potentially worrying is how far today's zombies - whether on TV, films or computer games have departed from the original concept."

Early zombies, as first portrayed in the *White Zombie* film, were the demoralised, undead slaves of voodoo priests. "Crucially, the end of that film and others of its time, spoke of hope and featured the overthrow of the controlling voodoo master by his 'zombie' slaves," Dr Pearce explains. From the late 1960s the nature of zombies changed and they were portrayed as hordes of brain-consuming monsters with no voodoo context and no controlling master."

"With no voodoo master, today's zombies have no clear controller to turn

against and free themselves from," Dr Pearce argues. "That means there are no effective plans for resistance and no hope for the future. Zombies may well be popular today because they speak to a similar feeling of [powerlessness](#) shared by many members of our society."

"The key question," he continues, "is why, like today's portrayal of zombies, are we unwilling to take a stand against the powers-that-be and are overwhelmed by a lack of political interest. It seems the time is right to reclaim the original zombie concept of a controlling sorcerer but one that can successfully be resisted. Today's zombie phenomenon is a really good opportunity to get people thinking about who may be wishing to control our brains and what resources we have to resist."

But what do we feel powerless against? Among the many possibilities, researchers suggest private ownership is a high profile offender. Clearly it's in the interests of competition to encourage mindless consumerism. "In the past, zombies wandered around consuming brains, but today's zombies are encouraged to wander around consuming the latest, heavily advertised, branded goods," Dr Pearce explains. And for those with power, it's clearly useful to them to have a 'zombified' society that does not challenge their decision-making under any circumstances.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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