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Zombies in Revolt: The Violent Revolution of American Cinematic Monsters

Abstract

This paper unveils the revolutionary potential incarnated in the post-9/11 transformed figure of the cinematic zombie. It is my contention that zombies, through their cinematic (r)evolution, came to embody Deleuze and Guattari's vision of the nomad war machine. Zombie films are used as a vehicle for addressing the tension between the hegemonic fear of the violent multitude in revolt and the counter-hegemonic liberatory potential of the rising masses. It is impossible to achieve a final resolution between these contradicting tendencies since the narrative structure of zombie films remains open-ended. The characteristics of the zombies and the meaning ascribed to them transform over time but they also maintain a continuity with a difference with the previous expressions of the monstrous. The monstrous characteristics which have pertained since George A. Romero's paradigm shift in the 1960s (the zombifying contagion, violence and swarm attacks), joined with the new features appearing in the American zombie cinema of the new millennium, formulate a response to the manifest and latent violence of the State apparatus.

Keywords: zombies, film, hegemony, nomad war machine, multitude, State apparatus

Introduction

The figure of a zombie continues to invade all media of contemporary fiction – in the last decade with an even greater intensity. This monstrous undifferentiated multitude of our modern-day bestiary can neither be entirely read nor contained within any existing theoretical paradigm. As a mixed category defined by its liminality and the disruption of the binary opposition between life and death, zombies resist classification and have to be analyzed "within the complex matrixes that

generate them" (Leverette 187). The monsters that terrify, appall and haunt us transform over time, together with their specific monstrous characteristics (Halberstam 8). The unfixed meaning of the zombie trope can be explained via Derrida's term of undecidability. Undecidable structures are "false verbal properties [. . .] that no longer can be included within philosophical (binary) oppositions, but which, however, inhabit philosophical oppositions, resting and disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term" (Derrida, Positions 43). Zombies, therefore, occupy a hymenal space of floating indetermination between life and death. They are neither alive nor dead. They are the (un)dead, resting within the empty space between parenthesis. The zombie – the liminal monster, the threshold persona – exists in the margins, exerts violence against difference and transgresses the boundaries of individual subjectivity. It is because of its in-betweeness of meaning and symbolic emptiness, that the zombie is so receptive to the inscription of various meanings. In their (r)evolution outlined below in the text, within the discursive field of American film, zombies have addressed the issues of colonialism, racism, war and consumerism, and, in their most recent incarnations, embodied the hegemonic anxieties over the rising multitude.

It is my intent to unveil the revolutionary potential inscribed in the new (un)dead – the potential which is realized through the zombies' transformation from a fantasy of an eternally docile workforce played out in the colonial narratives into a nightmarish vision of revolted masses which have no master. The encompassing theoretical assumption explicated in this analysis is Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of the zombie myth as a work myth which gradually evolved into a war myth in contemporary zombie films. Following the terminology developed in Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative works, we shall oppose the nomad war machine – a pure form of exteriority within the State – to the State and State apparatus – the form of interiority, which controls, disciplines, delineates and regulates everything in its reach, from people to territory, to capitalist markets, enabling some flows (capital), while disabling other (people). The danger which lies within the zombie apocalypse for the State apparatus is that of a worker who stopped working, a consumer who stopped consuming, a citizen who stopped obeying, a homo sacer who started to protest.

Terry Eagleton's warning that every literary text – and this applies to film text as well – functions as a dream text, "unconscious of itself, constituted by that relation to ideology which it cannot speak of directly, but can only manifest its mutations," must always be kept in mind (91). As free as it might

seem in its representations, the fundamental determination of the text by the constituents of its ideological matrix is always present and frustrates the potential of counter-hegemonic expression (74). Therefore, if every film is a dream text, complicit with the dominant ideology, and if every narrative has, as its background feature, the political unconscious buried beneath a layer of critical defense mechanisms, I propose the contemporary zombie narratives be read against the State's responses to the post-9/11 crisis of U.S. hegemony, aggravated by the crisis of neoliberal capitalism and civil protests. The State's dizzying discourse such as Donald Rumsfeld's famous coining of "unknown unknowns," the implementation of the USA PATRIOT Act, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, the extended declaration of emergency, the economic recession and the consequent bailout of big banks and businesses, produced a constant state of insecurity and growing discontent in the general populous, accompanied by a severe lack of trust in the government to act in the best interest of its citizens. These sentiments of disillusionment with the shattered myth of American exceptionalism, of America as the prime democratic and economic leader and defender of the so-called free world and human rights, found their expression in the Occupy movement and infused the imagination of American horror filmmakers, as analyzed bellow in the classification of the newly appearing tropes in zombie cinema. In the double bind between the drive to release the excess of revolutionary energies and the hegemonic drive to suppress and contain them in the domain of uncanny is where the contemporary zombie film finds its hymenal space.

Passive Beginnings: Puppets in Colonial Fantasies

The celluloid origins of the zombie can be directly traced to the American occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1935. It is the only monster in popular culture of non-Gothic origin and the only one who "almost entirely skipped an initial literary manifestation" to find its place on the silver screen (Bishop 13). The zombie myth emerged in the sugar plantations of Haiti during French rule, where it was not uncommon for slaves, in order to escape a life of slavery, to resort to suicide – a costly loss for early capitalist slave owners (Wilentz). Voodoo priests were used by their slave masters to dissuade other slaves from suicide as they would claim they would resurrect them as the (un)dead to toil in the sugarcane fields into eternity, never to return to Ginen[1] (Wilentz).

Zombies arose from the experience of colonial encounters – from being reduced into a thing for the ends of capital (Dayan 33). These zombie slave narratives were co-opted by the colonizers as the expression of their own fears and anxieties in the first zombie films, i.e. White Zombie (1932) and I walked with a Zombie (1943). These two films depict white colonial women made into a zombie puppet of a controlling (also white) colonialist who adopted Voodoo practices to further his or her goals. I walked with a Zombie is quite similar to the narrative of Jane Eyre, but with an addition of Rochester's mother as a Voodoo priestess. These dominantly female zombies were subservient, mute and non-aggressive. Both films can be read as expressions of colonial fears about the corrupting influence of living among the "others" – as a backlash of colonial practices. In addition, considering the period in which these early zombie films were made, an alternative reading can be offered. It does not take long to recognize, in those hollow zombie eyes, the exploited manual workers, who lived in a constant haze of bare life caused by long-term starvation during the Depression years. It is thus plausible, according to William K. Bishop, that the viewers, back then, saw either themselves, or their fellow citizens reflected in that monstrous metaphor (76).

Change of Paradigm: Age of George Romero

In 1968, George Romero, in his film Night of the Living Dead, brought the zombie figure back home, transforming it from the distant other into the next door neighbor. He also introduced the flesh eating zombie and a zombifying contagion. Romero's zombies were not controlled by anyone -- they did not listen to anyone and could not be reasoned with. They were terrifyingly free. Romero stated that he found inspiration for his film in Richard Matheson's novel I am Legend, as both the novel and the film have the same core theme – the one about a revolution: "There's this global change and there's one guy holding out saying, wait a minute, I'm still a human. He's wrong. Go ahead. Join them. You'll live forever! In a certain sense he's wrong but on the other hand, you've got to respect him for taking that position" (Romero, Cinema Blend). Apart from the novel's influence on the film, one must also bear in mind that 1968 was a year of great societal shifts in terms of the civil rights movement and anti-war protests. Viewed against the backdrop of the events which took place in the1960s, the political unconscious of the Night of the Living Dead reveals an uncertainty about a positive outcome of the changes taking place in the society,

especially after the sobering effects of Marin Luther King's and Robert Kennedy's assassinations, and a doubt about the power of a newly sexually liberated, quasi-egalitarian generation to usher in a new peaceful age free of racial strife. This ambiguity about the liberating effects of the zombie revolution and the nature of the society that manages to subdue it is best exhibited in the last sequence of the film. The film ends with its African American protagonist being killed by a group of militant white men, paired with the police, who mistake him for one of the (un)dead. During the end title sequence, we see a photo reel of him being dragged into the fire with meat hooks – images "disturbingly reminiscent of southern lynchings and police brutality" (Phillips 97).

The next significant shift in meaning occurred in Romero's second film Dawn of the Living Dead (1978) where zombies swarm to the cathedral of consumerism – to the shopping mall. Zombies from this film came to signify the dead weight of consumer capitalism that was on its rise in the 1970s.

In the third film of Romero's Living Dead series Day of the Dead (1985), the sympathies radically shift from the survivors to the zombies. This shift was accompanied with a severe critique of Regan's military-industrial complex during the last stages of the Cold War.

Between 1985 and 2001, the zombies of non-Romero origin, now talking and joking around, became a punch-line of a small number of zombie comedy flics released during that time. However, after the attacks on the World Trade Center, zombies returned to the big screen with a horrifying vengeance ushering in a "zombie renaissance" (Bishop 12).

Continuity With a Difference: The New Zombie Revolutionaries

Contemporary zombies draw their roots from their monstrous predecessors, "as films are nodes within a large network of other zombie films, horror films and films in general" (Neail 10). They still have some of the same characteristics as the ones that came before them. They are still contagious, attack within swarms and violently disrupt bodily boundaries. However, the meaning of these characteristics changed as the social, political and economic conditions under which these films were made also changed. First, I will attempt to give a counter-hegemonic reading of the

zombie contagion, their violence and their horde behavior by providing theoretical accounts where these characteristics were also ascribed to revolutionary movements.

The Zombie Contagion as Spreading of an Idea

Under the influence of Gustav Le Bon's seminal work The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind, social psychology and other social sciences of the late nineteenth century mystified insurrections, revolutions and criminal behaviors as results of a contagion – as pathological events created by irrational hordes who are driven by their instinctive desires and easily manipulated (Le Bon, 20).The "outbreak narratives" for explaining crowd behavior also found their way into the works of Georg Simmel and Gabriel Tarde, among others, persisting even to this day (Wald). However, with the rise of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century, they were given a different reading: "The idea that social processes and political and cultural transformations are contagious, proliferations of viruses that spread out in the social body and produce mutations [is] an idea that emerged from Felix [Guattari's] molecular vision" (Berardi Bifo 3).

The element of contagion is the sine qua non of Deleuze and Guattari's definition of packs, or how social groups form outside the institutions of the State apparatus. They describe a pack as a mobile multiplicity without the ancestral unity which spreads through contagion (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus 241). The pack is "the hunting machine, the war machine, the crime machine [. . .] all kinds of becoming-animal" (242). When forming a pack, "epidemic [is opposed] to filiation, contagion to hereditary, peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction. Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes" (241). In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari use vampires and werewolves, among others, as examples of a pack, but it is not hard to imagine how this conceptualization of a pack could also be extended to a zombie horde. For Guattari, the body is the central and primal source/location of the transformative, subversive and revolutionary energies. He goes on to say: "The 'revolutionary consciousness' is a mystification if it is not situated within a 'revolutionary body'[. . .] [T]he revolutionary body as a place where 'subversive' energies are produced – and a place where in truth all kinds of cruelties and oppressions have been perpetuated [has to produce its own liberation]" (208, 213). Through its body, the zombie infects us (the still-human) with the

revolutionary idea that remains forever unintelligible to the uninfected – to those outside the pack – and liberates the bodies from the shackles of disciplinary social norms.

The Violence of the Zombies: The Expression of Revolutionary Love

In zombie films, a still living person almost always encounters an (un)dead family member, partner or friend, who s/he used to or still loves. The great betrayal ensues when the zombified loved one tries to bite and infect him/her – to give the gift of (un)death. Here, we used the slightly modified Derridean term since the zombie's gift of (un)death is the one that paradoxically corresponds to Derrida's almost impossible conditions upon which something can be considered a gift. Both parties, on the sending and receiving end, must not be aware that the exchange of a gift took place: "[T]he gift of something remains inaccessible, unrepresentable, and as a consequence a secret. For one might say that a gift that could be recognized as such in the light of day, a gift destined for recognition, would immediately annul itself. The gift is the secret itself" (Derrida, Gift 29). The giving of this secret demands sacrifice, renunciation of the self and abnegation of the gift economy (30). This gift is terrifying, as it is nothing other than the (un)death itself (31). Zombies have no knowledge that they can spread their condition onto others who, in respect, do not want or acknowledge this secret gift. I will attempt to shed some light on the nature of this terrifying gift through the perceived betrayal of a zombie's bite.

Slavoj Žižek, in the Puppet and the Dwarf, claims that Judas is the unsung hero of the New Testament because his betrayal and willingness to sacrifice his eternal soul enabled the fulfillment of the divine plan (16). His betrayal is the highest expression of love since the birth of universality demands the destruction of particularities through a self-annulling act of infidelity: "[L]ove is a violent passion to introduce a Difference, a gap in the order of being, to privilege and elevate some object at the expense of others. Love is violence [and] violence is already the love choice as such, which tears its object out of its context, elevating it to the Thing" (33). It is Žižek's opinion that proper revolutionary ethics and radical political struggles must entail a violent sacrifice which, although a "work of love," can never be redeemed: to sacrifice your subjectivity and betray your family - to become "the living dead"- is the only way to further your revolutionary mission, but it is

also a path of no return ("Towards a definition"). It just might be the case that zombie films give Žižek what he finds lacking in our "liberal" society: an ultra-caffeinated revolution which not only smells but reeks (Parallax View 309).

Swarm Attacks in the City Streets

It is a well-known fact that zombies are most dangerous when they attack in a horde (a swarm or a pack), but what attracts them to each other? Are they aware that their power lies in sheer numbers? They are, almost without exception, perceived as having no consciousness. However, the below paragraph from Hardt and Negri's Multitude suggests otherwise:

> *The network attack is described as a swarm because it appears formless. Since the network has no center that dictates order, those who can only think in the terms of traditional models may assume it has no organization whatsoever – they see mere spontaneity and anarchy. The network attack appears as something like a swarm of birds or insects in a horror film, a multitude of mindless assailants, unknown, uncertain, unseen and unexpected. If one looks inside a network however, one can see that it is indeed organized, rational and creative. The swarm has intelligence. (91)*

Unfortunately, the only way to gain access to the inside of a zombie network is to become one of them – to unknowingly accept their gift. Since the zombie figure has been appropriated for various collective performances and protests, there is a possibility to analyze zombie gatherings and their network behavior. In 2007, the San Francisco Apple Store was flooded by a zombie flash mob staging an anti-consumerist performance where "zombies" pretended to eat computers on display (McAlister 460). In 2011, they appeared within the Occupy Wall Street movement to draw attention on the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. And last, but not least, they are the protagonists of Zombie Walks – urban public gatherings of hundreds of people (or sometimes thousands) who roam around the streets in swarms, dressed like and mimicking zombies. These assemblies are not overtly political or have a clear, articulated agenda, and their participants do not physically attack others in any shape or form. However, what they do attack, or disrupt and negotiate, are the codes of behavior in public spaces. It can also be said, as Sarah Juliet Lauro suggests, that these

zombie walks challenge the mechanisms of a Hollywood spectacle, “kidnapping” the monster from the screen and placing it on the street level.

The Zombie Myth as a Work Myth Transformed into a War Myth

Deleuze and Guattari claim that the myth of zombies– “mortified schizos, good for work, brought back to reason” (Anti-Oedipus 335) – as the only modern myth – “is a work myth and not a war myth” (Thousand Plateaus 425). However, I propose that these two myths be conjoined in the reading of new manifestations of the zombie trope. These “predisabled people, preexisting amputees, the stillborn, the congenitally infirm, the one-eyed and one-armed” (426), all those mutilated to fit the needs of the State apparatus awake from their mortified schizo state in the terrifying figure of the zombie war machine. The characteristics Deleuze and Guattari ascribe to the nomad war machine could also be ascribed to the zombie horde or the zombie pack. Their organization is numerical: “quantity is everywhere” (390). They destroy the striated spaces, all enclosures, turning them into smooth spaces. Zombies decode and deterritorialize the State apparatus bringing forth into visibility their mutilated form created by systemic violence. They are the “deterritorialized par excellence” (381). Speed characterizes the nomad war machine whose parts “fill a smooth space in the manner of a vortex” (381). This is also a new characteristic of contemporary zombies which the fans of older zombie incarnations adamantly detest.

Zombies are at the same time “monstrous symptoms of a violent, manipulative, exploitative society” and “potential remedies for its ills,” as they, with their deconstruction of hierarchies, binaries and socio-economic order, open up a possibility of creating the world anew (Shaviro, Cinematic Body 87). Of course, imagining the dispossessed, exploited, mutilated workers and other homines sacri turning into a war machine and their potential revolutionary counterattacks against the State and the capitalist system as a zombie apocalypse would suggest a hegemonic character of contemporary zombie narratives. “From the standpoint of the State,” the originality and creativity of the nomad war machine “necessarily appears in a negative form: stupidity, deformity, madness, illegitimacy, usurpation, sin” (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus 353). However, through its cinematic representations in American films, the nomad war machine can play a double role: the one of revolutionaries and the other of reactionaries. As Fredric Jameson affirms, it is not

necessarily a matter of an either-or-situation: “Films [are] sometimes the source of resistance to the hegemony as well as the form such hegemony ultimately takes” (454). At this point, we will proceed to give a detailed account of the new elements introduced in contemporary zombie films.

The Source of the Zombifying Contagion

Jeffrey Cohen, in his book on Monster Theory, argues that “every monster is [. . .] a double narrative, two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves” (13). Surprisingly, in older zombie films the explanation of the origin and nature of a zombifying contagion has been extremely vague or entirely avoided. This still seems to be the practice with few notable exceptions. In 28 days later (2002) the virus was created by the state-financed scientists and released by naive animal freedom fighters. In Resident Evil (2002) the virus was created by a multinational corporation called Umbrella, devised to be used as a biological weapon. In Serenity (2005), the cinematic offshoot of the Firefly series, the space zombies, or Reavers, were created in the government’s attempt to pacify its rebellious population. These examples quite directly point to the lack of trust in the government (or private capital) to make decisions that are in the best interest of the people, and they all name the system as the culprit for creating the zombifying contagion.

Use of News Footage

The use of news footage in zombie films, and also in most apocalyptic films, became a common practice in a post-9/11 world. The severity of the threat is often not recognized because the attacks are labeled by the media in the films as rioting, protests or civil unrests, i.e. in Diary of the Dead (2007) and Dead Set (2008). The film 28 days later starts with a montage of archival footage of riots and violence from all over the world, including the public torture and murder of the last President of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan by the Taliban regime in 1996, played on a loop to an infected monkey (Baishya). This intrusion of the real horror into reel horror usually happens in the beginning of the film, before the zombie apocalypse has commenced, and/or in the middle of the film. It depicts the world in turmoil and the cultural decadence that ensued even before the introduction of the zombie novum. It suggests that the world, in the eschatological

sense, deserved what was coming to it. The footage of looting, civil unrests and waves of refugees inserted in the middle of the film, as in World War Z (2013), have a sobering effect in the recognition that the world does not need zombies to destroy it.

Associating protests with the rise of the zombies reveals a deeply rooted political anxiety about the fast rising multitude which can no longer be “shocked and awed” and which is resistant to all ideologies (Brooks 104). Similarly, during the 2011 Arab Spring revolutionary wave of protests in North Africa and the Middle East, the phrase “We are no longer afraid” was one of the most recurring sentiments expressed by the rebellious masses (Gordillo).

Zombies’ Overwhelming Speed

The depiction of fast zombies is the new invention in zombie films. The fast zombies were used in the remake of Dawn of the Dead (2004) and in the before mentioned 28 days later and World War Z. The World War Z film stands out not only because of its planetary reach, as it covers the whole globe, but because it depicts the zombie multitude which moves and spreads over the territory at an overwhelming velocity, creating massive avalanches of bodies (Gordillo). As Paul Virilio points out in his study of dromology: “The masses are not a population, a society, but the multitude of passers-by. The revolutionary contingent attains its ideal form not in the place of production, but in the street, where for a moment it stops being a cog in the technical machine and itself becomes a motor (machine of attack), in other words a producer of speed” (3). Revolution, in this sense, really goes faster than the people, to echo the words of President-General Costa-Gomes, since zombies are at the same time more and less than people (Virilio 136). The unutterable Idea of a global change is what gives its carriers – the producers of speed, the zombies – this super-human speed.

Building Fortresses and Walled Enclosures

Zombies and revolutionary movements also share the common characteristic of deterritorializing State controlled spaces. In previous zombie films, the survivors hid in the already built structures that were at their disposal, i.e. a cabin in Night of the Living Dead, a shopping mall in Dawn of the Living Dead and a military complex in Day of the Dead. In both World War Z and Romero’s Land of

the Dead (2005), the survivors' strategy to cope with this deterritorialization was the production of walled, fortified, spatial enclosures – a tendency also witnessed in the post-9/11 U.S. politics. This tendency is manifested in the Secure Fence Act, passed by the United States Congress in 2006, which mandates the construction of a double-layered 1,125 kilometers long fence, along the U.S.-Mexico border (Tavares 33). It is also reified in the building of the "empire of [military] bases" in 120 overseas countries (Johnson). Since 9/11, as Chalmers Johnson notes, the U.S. military has established colossal base structures in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia (with 106 installments in Iraq and Afghanistan). These State's responses to the attack on the U.S. hegemony, legitimized by a discourse of insecurity, produced an "increase [in] surveillance and policing, as well as residential fortification, including the building of gated communities" (Low 48). We go on to analyze the enclosures presented in the above mentioned films.

World War Z

In World War Z, the only two countries, and the third mentioned in Max Brooks' novel on which the film was based, which were able to contain the zombie insurrection, are Israel, North Korea and South Africa (only mentioned in the novel). North Korea succeeded to avail the catastrophe because all the teeth of its population were indiscriminately pulled out. Israel and South Africa managed to build fortified enclosures in time only because they had already made plans to do it before in order to combat civil insurrections. In the book, the man who devised the plan for fortifying South Africa was a former Apartheid official who says: "It was a doomsday scenario for the country's white minority, the plan to deal with an all-out uprising of its indigenous African population" (106). The same conclusion that Virilio drew can also be made here: "Totalitarianism goes hand-in-hand with the development of the state's hold over the circulation of the masses" (16). We learn in the film that the Israel West Bank Barrier, or the anti-terrorist fence, as it is also called, was completed within a week. Israel, in the film and in the book, is commended for its humanitarian decision to let the uninfected Palestinians inside the "Fortress Israel." The West Bank wall is rebranded in the film as the border which protects and separates the humans from the (un)dead threat. Within the walls of "Fortress Israel," an orgiastic multicultural celebration occurs when Palestinians and Jews join into a celebratory song. What binds this newly formed chain of equivalence is the negative universality created on the basis of being threatened by the same

external force. However, this equivalence is not a sustainable one, as the true universal totality, a universal subject, or the zombie horde, destroy it within minutes. To be more precise, the Israeli-Palestinian song of a newfound friendship agitates the zombie horde which, consequently, swarms the wall and overtakes the "Fortress Israel" turning it into a universal spectral body of the zombie multitude.

Land of the Dead

George Romero wrote the script for his film Land of the Dead (2005) before 9/11, but as he states in an interview, he adjusted it to "address this new [post-9/11] normal" – the obsession with securing the borders and fencing off the ever-widening category of people who are deemed a threat for the national security (Romero, About Movies). In Land of the Dead, the rich reside in a suburban casino/shopping mall fortification called the Fiddler's Green, while the others either work for them or beg for scraps in the slums. Fiddler's Green stands as an example of how the emergency created by the zombie apocalypse, or any traumatic Event for that matter, also occasions reactionary and violent assertions of the State mechanisms, as witnessed in the suspension of habeas corpus by President Bush and the passing of the Secure Fence Act in the 9/11 aftermath.

The zombies from the Land of the Dead have been confined within a former picket fence suburban settlement of Union Town, since the surviving human populace learned how to control them. They put up a spectacle of fireworks at which zombies cannot help but stare, while humans go around Union Town bashing zombies' heads with baseball bats. However, one of them manages to awake from the power of the spectacle and tries to "awake" the others. Many of the (un)dead are still dressed in their work clothes. We see a gas attendant, football players, a nurse, a band of musicians and a butcher roaming the street and clumsily repeating bodily movements that they once needed for performing their jobs, as if arrested in perpetual remembering of their previous lives. Throughout the film, the zombies gradually gain an unprecedented level of agency and march to exert revenge on their abusers in Fiddler's Green. When the assembled zombie army finally raids the luxury fortification of the rich, the army of the human poor joins forces with the zombie workers to bring down the rich tyrants. This film serves as a clear example of how

revolutionary politics can be depicted within the site of contemporary American film, without necessarily turning into a hegemonic narrative.

"We are all infected" Trope

The new trope which started to appear in zombie films is that we are all already infected, that we cannot simply die, but only rise as the (un)dead. We see it happen in Fido (2005), Diary of the Dead (2007) and the TV series Walking Dead (2010-). In the World War Z version of this trope, the remaining human population gets inoculated with another unnamed virus in order to become "invisible" for the bearers of the zombie virus. There is certainly a pandemic going around: a pandemic of exclusion, of being made redundant, of people being turned into homines sacri. We are not invisible to those affected, but rather they are invisible to us. Their pleas sound like unarticulated growls of the lazy and the mad, easily discarded if we have bought into the American Dream turned into a neoliberal myth that one can become immune to the restructuring of the capitalist system if we just work hard enough and give it our best. To use Ranciere's terminology, the division of the sensible – that is, whose voice is heard as language and whose as a mere growl – is becoming increasingly discriminatory and exclusive. If there is some truth to this "we are all infected" zombie trope, it is only a matter of time before we are all able to understand the zombies' pleas as belonging to a coherent political register.

Final Thoughts: Taking a Step Back

The nomad war machine can wage war against the State only "on the condition that [it] simultaneously create[s] something else, if only new nonorganic social relations" (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus 423). However, zombies can only create an organic community based on an impossible universal equivalence. By removing State imposed codes, they level the field for the human survivors who are never up to the task of creating anything socially and politically sustainable. In zombie films, most of the surviving population spends its final days pillaging, raping, murdering, attempting to recreate the old system that failed or instituting an even more totalitarian and militarized form of governance. Some try to domesticate zombies for menial labor since zombies do not need to sleep, eat or get paid. These experiments regularly end in

bloodshed of those leading the civilizing process![2] Others just spend their time devising and executing new and cruel methods of torturing zombies![3] The survivors who are supposed to be the creative element of the nomad war machine, without exception suffer from a severe impotence of political imagination as if they are being haunted by the specter of Margaret Thatcher stating that there is no alternative to the neoliberal capitalist system. In spite of some progressive elements zombie films assert, the majority of them, in the end, support the status quo as they dismantle all other alternatives and play out fantasies about a revolution of the multitude in the form of a nightmarish zombie apocalypse. Still, hope for the further counter-hegemonic development of the zombie trope lies in the open-ended narrative structure of zombie films. The final outcome might seem bleak but, for now, it remains undecided.

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[1] Ginen or lan guinée, “this final rest — in green, leafy, heavenly Africa, with no sugarcane to cut and no master to appease or serve — is unavailable to the zombie” (Wilentz).

[2] Even though zombies learn, or start to remember, how to use weapons and enjoy music (Day of the Dead) or use more technologically advanced appliances such as telephones and cameras (Resident Evil: Extinction), they cannot be pacified enough to create new value through work. However, there is one exception to the rule. At the very end of Shaun of the Dead (2004), it is humorously stated on TV that zombies are being used as workers in the service industry. This statement is accompanied by an image of a zombie chained to a shopping cart. Nevertheless, as we could observe in Fido (2006), the film which provides a more in-depth analysis on the topic of pacified zombie labor, every chain can break, or every electric collar used to control the unskilled zombie worker can malfunction, eventually causing an all-out bloodbath. One zombie in Fido capable of relatively restraining his violent urges, even without his electric collar, is upgraded from the house help to the position of a beloved family member.

[3] Land of the Dead (2010).

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