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Displacing the Dead – Remapping of Post-apocalyptic Geographies

Dying Maps

To question space within gothic or horror narratives means attempting to understand the concept of the “failure of the map,” a notion very closely related to the production of gothic narratives. Based on the premise that the “gothic map” can never be fully understood or grasped, gothic narratives invariably manage to manipulate and play upon the reader’s or viewer’s attempts to locate the narrator, protagonist, or to a certain extent themselves within the space at hand. Additional complications arise from the transitional moment between space and place. Following Yi Fu Tuan’s notion of this transition based on the process of inscribing meaning into space, thus opening the doors to literally countless forms of places, the gothic manages to constantly offer new narratives, or at least old narratives, encapsulated in alternative (and often innovative) spaces/places.

The problem arising from this interpretative fluidity is the inability to properly trace (at least from an academic point of view) the contours of these mostly fantastic and always dark places. A possible alternative to these perpetually changing spaces can perhaps be found in various zombie narratives, where space, still bound by the “absence of rules,” does not offer a conclusive solution to the constantly reinvented gothic map but, being so strongly rooted in our contemporaneity, allows for a more contextualized and therefore relevant theoretical reading of space. Such understanding of space surpasses the potential storyline-bound initial questions of setting and its relevance, and moves forward towards problematizing the politics of zombie spatiality. Accordingly, this analysis aims to observe three different space paradigms that appear in zombie narratives, with particular focus placed on one specific narrative—Robert Kirkman’s comic book series *The Walking Dead*, as well as the later TV series developed by Frank Darabont. Although the television series only initially coincides with the storyline present in the comic book, the analysis will consider both as part of a unified narrative universe. The purpose of such a potentially unorthodox analytical approach therefore will not be to provide a detailed reading of a particular narrative, but will instead propose and delineate different theoretical space paradigms that characterize, in this case Kirkman’s, zombie narrative.¹

¹ Regardless of the involvement of Frank Darabont, together with other writers and contributors, Robert Kirkman continuously oversaw and directly contributed to the production and development of both the comic book and the television series. Such an approach to the creative process assured a strong initial adherence to the source materials, as well as the appropriate adaptation of the new storylines to the originally set post-apocalyptic world.

With this in mind, the analysis will offer three different theoretical points of view—starting with Yi Fu Tuan’s and Gaston Bachelard’s perception of domestic spaces and their specific theoretical function and presence within the narrative at hand, Marc Augé’s creation of “non-places” as well as the notion of the *traveller* as the key to the spatial transition that follows, and the final articulation of space within zombie narratives, one which occurs through the construction of neoliberal context/space as defined by David Harvey. It is important, however, to point out that all of the proposed readings of space/place are not necessarily diachronic in their nature, or more precisely, that one analyzed spatial paradigm is not necessarily the evolutionary product of a previous one. Although an argument for such an evolutionary progression could be made, the focus of the article is firmly based on presenting and expanding different possible theoretical readings of space/place within the *Walking Dead* narrative as separate theoretical paradigms. A more comprehensive analysis of the potential interlacing of these complex theoretical readings would be possible, but such an endeavor would surpass the limited scope of this article. Nevertheless, all of the proposed interpretations mark in a way a progression in the process of reading space within zombie narratives, but also, as will be shown, they offer a more tangible, although strictly theoretical, delineation of what can be described as zombie geography.

However, this attempt to trace the (de)construction of space in *The Walking Dead*, or many other contemporary zombie narratives, heavily relies on a non-uniform theoretical approach. What could be defined as the now dying maps of the lives that we once led are in fact potential insights into a multitude of cultural uncertainties that characterize our contemporaneity. As will be discussed later, the issue of zombie narrative space from its initial articulations develops into a multi-discursive concept, simultaneously allowing for an understanding of a debated issue, while consenting only to a limiting reading/understanding of a particular narrative. The initial spatial paradigm will therefore be constructed and proposed on what could be considered a “classic” or, more precisely, strictly anthropocentric, reading of space, as offered by Yi Fu Tuan and Gaston Bachelard. Both authors primarily outline a space defined by men and through men, which, when superimposed over the analyzed narratives, creates a powerful opposing image between the site of domesticity and the now post-apocalyptic setting. This dichotomy between the once romanticized home and the stark violent reality of its disappearance will define the initial theoretical reading of the spatial turn that has occurred.

The following analysis, however, will move beyond the initial traditional binarity between space and place and focus more on the unstable spatiality of particular zombie narratives in relation to its significance to our contemporary political contexts and conditions. What the analysis proposes is a shift from a binary but nevertheless stable space/place opposition into what Marc Augé defines as a state belonging to supermodernity. Postmodernity, or what Augé refers to as supermodernity, presents a different theoretical approach to the space/place relation by introducing the notion of *non-places*. According to Tim Cresswell, “Non-places are sites marked by their transience – the preponderance of mobility . . . By non-place Augé is referring to sites

marked by the ‘fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral’” (45–46). Augé continues by pointing out the importance of the notion of the traveler, whose space is in fact the archetype of non-place (*Non-Places* 70). Augé’s *traveller* and the concept of *non-place*, as contextualized within the analysis of *The Walking Dead*, will indicate a potential new spatial phase, projecting the inherent instability of contemporary spaces. Once again it is important to point out that the presence (or emergence) of a new spatial paradigm does not negate the continuing existence of the established space/place binarity proposed by Tuan and Bachelard, but instead functions only as a possibly different theoretical perspective on reading space in zombie narratives. The third spatial turn that the analysis will address is premised on David Harvey’s concept of political economy of place in relation to capitalism, or more precisely, when contextualized within the present analysis, on the relationship between entrepreneurial freedoms and a post-apocalyptic world. As the analysis will propose, this last spatial turn can in fact be observed as further distancing from the construction of space/place founded on an individual and subjective experience. What is left is a reading of post-apocalyptic spaces that share an uneasy resemblance to contemporary living practices. Premised on the tension of mobile capital and fixed places, or narratively contextualized as the need to accumulate “capital” necessary for survival in an ever-transforming space, the last theoretical frame offers perhaps the most direct insight into the relevance of the political discourse looming under the surface of zombie narratives. However, as stated earlier, the proposed theoretical readings are in no way definitive, nor do they represent everything that this genre has to offer. What they do represent are challenging insights into the critical multi-discursive nature of zombie narratives.

Housing the Dead

When analyzing the connection between spaces/places and gothic or horror narratives, it becomes almost instantaneously obvious that this relation is complex and almost uniquely based on the premise that space, or the subsequent place, cannot be charted out, defined, or confined to some type of fixed meaning or map. However, when considering the development of the spatial paradigm in zombie narratives, it can be observed that the relevance of the spatial element in their early American incarnations differs from their later development.

A keystone example and a classical case study in discussions of zombie narratives is George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). One of the central points of reference in discussions of the numerous issues presented by this milestone of American cinema has been the representation of the house. In accordance with the by then well-established tradition, present within various American-based narratives, of the representation of the house as a relevant topos which acts as a catalyst or a set of symbolic values necessary for the further development of a particular storyline, Romero’s house presents itself as one of the key features needed for the construction of the story. Similar to the historical burden that characterizes European castles, imbued with the symbolic meaning of family, bloodline, and history or, generally speaking, imbued

with an elaborate and specific social and cultural set of values, the house also stands as a symbol, as well as an active and now re-defined gothic space.²

The pattern presented by Romero is a rather simple one, and one that will be followed and emulated by countless other authors in their reinterpretations of the (sub)genre. It consists of an initially small group of people joining with other individuals or groups in their attempt to find a safe location where to regroup, organize, and potentially rationalize the apocalyptic events surrounding them. The house, however, initially specifically defined as a safe location that will separate the unfortunate characters from the surrounding horrors, soon becomes a limiting space, forcing the (purposely) contrasting characters to face each other, which allows Romero to construct a meticulous social critique. Nevertheless, even though the house, with its rich symbolical tapestry, should in fact transcend the topographic simplicity of a safe location, it fails to do so. This failure to “spatially evolve,” or to allow the characters at least an attempt to start Tuan’s process of “inscription,” is caused mostly by Romero’s insistence on constructing and presenting the house as an allegory, whose purpose is to provide a symbolic articulation of the American dream and the initial phases of its deconstruction, the disappearing post–World-War-II “family values”, the impeding sexual revolution, and the brutally obvious racial issue, among other things.³ With this in mind, regardless of the constant interaction of the various characters with the space at hand, the house is limited in its functioning as a setting, void of the level of intimacy needed for the completion of space–place transition, while simultaneously failing to project the experience of any of the characters, and thus failing to become, in a way, an active participant within the narrative. What the viewers are left with is a space functioning within a reality whose symbolic value and meaning is quite clear to both the participating characters and the viewers themselves, but whose reality is stripped down to a very basic scenography needed for the ongoing problems existing between the numerous conflicting characters.

² Interestingly enough, the symbolic value of the castle within the classic gothic genre has been overwhelmingly debated and analyzed. The house, however, simultaneously very present but also theoretically somewhat neglected, represents the continuation and development of the values initially set forth by the imagery of the castle. As Barry Curtis elaborates, “Since the mid-eighteenth century the haunted house has incorporated elements of the feudal castle, the ruined monastery and the remote cottage and sustained fictions of illicit ownership and the ghostly resilience of rightful inheritance. Within the framework of the conventional haunted house narrative there is a trans-dimensional archetype that incorporates these themes” (*Dark Places* 34).

³ As stated by Kyle William Bishop in *American Zombie Gothic*, “As a metaphor for the modern age, Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* presents audiences with the true monster threatening civilization: humanity itself. Whereas the screen zombies of the 1930s and ’40s function primarily as allegories for racial inequality and imperial injustice, the “new” zombies of the late 1960s and beyond work as uncanny manifestations of other repressed societal fears and insecurities, such as the dominance of the white patriarchy, the misogynistic treatment of women, the collapse of the nuclear family, and the unchecked violence of the Vietnam War” (95).

A much more intimate representation of the domestic space (and, in a way, the first actual spatial paradigm that I would like to discuss) is the representation of the domestic surroundings in Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* (2003-present), both in the comic book series and the television show, whose visual representation of space strongly relies on the above-mentioned interactions with both the symbolic value and the real value of the depicted domestic spaces. But what is the initial *domestic* space within *The Walking Dead* series? This initial space is, in all its apparent simplicity, the home, or more precisely, the house(s) of the main characters. Nevertheless, this supposedly simple space projects an ambivalent meaning. At first it is a space of safety, or as Gaston Bachelard would define it, domesticity, "our first universe . . . a group of organic habits" (viii). The home is therefore a safety zone, a purposely confining space that we can experience, or while acting as viewers, that we can easily identify with. By following the initial couple of issues of the comic, as well as the much more dramatized and visually stronger depiction in the television series of the now ruined home and its initial rediscovery by the character of Rick Grimes, what we are offered is not Romero's vision of the house as an accumulation of cultural or social symbols, but instead a familiar setting, now warped and destroyed by the apocalypse, that still retains the detailed familiarity that makes it a home. Frame by frame (regardless of whether we observe the comic panel or a video segment) we are exposed to the abandoned bedrooms of the house, living rooms, family portraits together with numerous other details, as well as the angst and sorrow accompanying the ongoing realization of the main character that the notion of his once familiar and safe place is rapidly dissolving in front of him. However, the familiarity persists, and for a very brief and uncertain period of time, the familiar place once again projects the sensation of safety over the main character. It is this familiarity that allows the initial transition into a place of meaning, regardless of the obvious apocalyptic influence that can be felt at this particular juncture in the narrative. Using the perspectives developed by Yi-Fu Tuan or David Seamon, it could be said that this familiarity allows the transformation, even if it is brief, of a space into a place of attachment, belonging, and rootedness, an intimate place of rest where one can retreat to from the hustle of the outside world (Tuan *Language* 684–96; Seamon 78–85).

The projected possibility of a brief pause from the outside horrors, however, is completely dispersed in the later episodes and seasons of the television series. A particularly strong take on the topic of deconstructed safety of the home, along with the longed-for peacefulness of domesticity, can be observed in the fifth season of the series. The ninth episode of the season, titled "What Happened and What's Going On," once again revisits the continuous need of the wandering group of survivors to find safety in a new home and to rebuild the now lost place of intimacy. The episode begins with a pastiche of intersecting images foreshadowing the events that will take place in the episodes ahead, combining flashbacks, family photographs, and what appears to be a child's bedroom. This initial sequence ends with the image of a small painting of an idyllic house, surrounded by peaceful nature scenery. The painting is located on a

dirty and bloody carpet, and blood, from a non-visible source, soon starts dripping over it, covering the image and eerily suggesting an imminent traumatic end to the projected notion of safety and peacefulness. The challenge to the projection of the home, however, does not stop at this “simple” metaphoric level. As the viewer soon discovers, the characters are scouting a gated community in hope of finding, if not a safe place, then at least some additional supplies. The search escalates with Noah, one of the members of the scouting party, returning with a companion—Tyreese Williams—to his original house, hoping to find his mother and his twin brothers. However, the mother is dead, decomposing on the living room floor, and Tyreese, while exploring the rest of the house, is attacked and bit by one of the twins, now turned into a walking dead.

The proposed final deconstruction of the domestic space/place that was, as mentioned earlier, only momentarily reclaimed by the character of Rick Grimes during the exploration of his house, is now made explicitly visible through a progressive dissection of space/place. A better understanding of this progressive dissection might be achieved by framing these spatial alterations within Tuan’s generally accepted initial organization of space. By placing the human body at the center, Tuan proposes a reading of space according to human perception. The front space therefore becomes “primarily visual” and “illuminated”. “Back space,” he continues, “is ‘dark,’ even when the sun shines, simply because it cannot be seen” (*Space* 40). This division and notion consequently applies to concepts such as temporality (front – future, back – past), or human relationships and behavior (with the front side of the human face suggesting dignity, while the back is profane and shadowy [*Space* 40]).

In the context of the present analysis, the distinction may be said to affect the construction of our domestic spaces, where the opposition of “front space” to the concept of “back space” encapsulates a whole spectrum of meaning and types of behavior. While the front spaces of our living quarters, such as living rooms or dining rooms, serve as a type of stage where moderated and presentable behavior is being performed, the back spaces, such as guest-rooms and bedrooms, inevitably project a sense of concealment and invisibility. These rooms are implicitly our spaces of intimacy where one can feel completely safe and relaxed, and where the notion of domesticity is most fully epitomized. It is through this division of front and back spaces that the proposed final deconstruction of the “sites of our intimate lives” (Bachelard 8) occurs. The front space of the house, the public one, finds Noah’s mother, once returned from the dead, but now just lying motionless on the floor of the living room. The setting evokes any number of houses visited by the group over the period of time, most of all the quintessential confronting moment between Rick Grimes and the now post-apocalyptic reality that marks the beginning of the *Walking Dead* narrative.

However, what was an introductory and a safe interaction with the space that was once Grimes’s home is now being replaced with multiple layers of corruption and a tangible and gradual deconstruction of a place. As Tyreese moves away from the living room towards the bedroom located in the back segment of the house, the viewers become aware of an almost measurable penetration into the intimacy of the house and

the family that lived there. While Grimes, during the exploration of his own home, experiences for a brief moment what was once his inner sanctum, only to continue his search for other survivors, Tyreese explores what was initially left unarticulated, or more precisely, he faces the no longer safe home surroundings. He reaches the children's bedroom, where he finds one child dead, while the other attacks him, sealing his fate with a bite. Although the portrayed attack does not significantly differ from numerous other similar zombie attack scenes, the spatial context is an extraordinary one. The ensuing polarity between spaces continues within the children's bedroom, which, besides being (from a locational point of view) opposite to the front spaces, is also immediately featured as a place whose privacy is emphasized by toys, posters, and other small significant elements, symbolically setting it apart from the living room, which is now perceived as an almost barren theatrical stage. A strong dichotomy is instantly constructed through the variation of images that include various photographs placed on walls and shelves, showing now almost phantasmagoric happy family moments, only to be alternately replaced by the image of a rotting corpse of a child looming behind the character of Tyreese. The climactic final moment of deconstruction of what was once a safe place of home takes us back to the initial painting of the house lying on the now bloody carpet. Dripping blood now defiles the painted image of an idyllic home, set within a beautiful and peaceful backdrop, indicating the unstoppable transformation of the place.

Observing the Dead

By returning to the initial narrative arc, we encounter again the character of Rick Grimes, who is forced by the now no longer hospitable home to push on with the exploration of the new world surrounding him, as well as to continue with the search for his family. Reflecting for a moment on the earlier mentioned traditional gothic and/or horror notion of the failure of the map, we notice a decisive shift in the process of construction and perception of space. As opposed to the previous inability to define a horror space due to its perilous vagueness, the zombie narrative provides a precise moment in time, as well as in space, where the main character can accurately locate himself and observe, if capable and willing, the transitional moment that characterizes his surroundings. In many ways, this precise moment functions within a zombie narrative as the basis for both the progression of the narrative as well as the analytical turning point through which we can observe the formation of a new spatial pattern.

The ambiguity of the once simple space/place is now becoming more prominent, inevitably leading to the creation of a spatial dichotomy comprised of the initial place of the home, with all of its domesticity and the protection it provides, and the simultaneously present and imminent future development of the narrativized space/place. The genesis of this dichotomy stems from the apocalyptic moment. The zombie plague, the birth of the monstrous within and from the domestic place, disintegrates those Bachelardian spatial alveoli containing compressed time (*Poetics* 8), or

more precisely, it disintegrates memories⁴. All of the articulations of the emotional inscriptions that allowed the construction of *place* are now being soiled by the sudden evolution of an intimate monstrous “Other,” whose domestic nature affects not only the unfortunate characters, but also the given space/place. Following the pattern set by Romero, through which a house becomes an unhomely/*unheimlich* space, the contemporary zombie narratives, in this case *The Walking Dead*, are now located first in an estranged place, only to be shortly followed by a location that could only be defined as *placelessness*.

An example, and the setting of a general tone, can be observed in the brief but meaningful opening sequence in the first three seasons of the television show. The opening sequence consists of a series of grainy, washed-out segments alternately portraying images of characters, obviously contextualized as family photographs, newspaper clippings, and the like, contributing to the instantaneous familiarization of the viewer with the characters, and a series of images rapidly escalating from an initially domestic context to images of dwellings and cityscapes, schools, hospitals, and urban centers, and finally stopping with an overview of a city with two highway lines—one outbound, crammed with fleeing vehicles, and the other one inbound, completely deserted.

The proposed imagery, therefore, very clearly states that something has happened, even though the viewers are not explicitly told what. The abandoned houses and cities undoubtedly evoke an apocalyptic situation, an image enforced by the metaphorically expressed but obviously shattered everyday existence of the protagonists. However, in addition to presenting the context of the story, the introduction also offers an additional reading of the issue of space/place within zombie narratives. Following the proposed, somewhat diachronic spatial evolution, the opening sequence marks the creation and perpetuation of the second spatial paradigm. Each of the frames contributing to the imagery functions as the earlier-mentioned Bachelardian “spatial alveoli,” or in other words, as a “potential” memory. Each potential memory in turn, when placed within a particular spatial context, is simultaneously also located on the verge of becoming a place. But the proposed transformation, the inscription of meaning, remains unaccomplished, and what we are left with is the position of Marc Augé’s traveller – an observer of a sequence of events, a succession of “partial glimpses, a series of ‘snapshots’ piled hurriedly into the memory of the traveller” (69). The theoretical “status” or “role” of Augé’s *traveller* is not, however, a position shared and experienced by all of the characters present within the post-apocalyptic setting of *The Walking Dead*. Instead, this particular approach to and

⁴ Bachelard introduces the notion of the *spatial alveoli* while discussing the practice of topoanalysis (“systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” [8]) in relation to concepts such as the house and memory. By entering our own house, our memories are triggered by any number of different locations. As explained by Bachelard, cellars, garrets, nooks, and corridors have the possibility to contain and refer to some type of memory (8)—a specific occurrence suspended within a particular space and (past) time. These alveoli therefore function as compressed time, unfolded into a memory the moment a person revisits and (re)experiences a certain location.

reading of space is almost exclusively constructed and developed around the character of Rick Grimes, through whom the readers (and viewers) experience the initial exposure to the new world.

This idea of the presence of a second spatial paradigm can be further developed through Augé's notion that "if a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with an identity will be a non-place" (63). The first notion proposed by Augé, the concept of the *traveller* and his/her perception of the surroundings while on the move, and the simultaneously moving surroundings, frame the multi-discursive spatial problematic of the introduction. It clearly indicates the now obvious detachment of the characters from what was once their home, and by doing that, deconstructs the complex symbolical network of meaning formerly embodied in the imagery (or place) of a home or a house, while simultaneously infringing upon the *fourth wall* and allowing the viewers to actively partake in the role of the *traveller*. The viewers, now sharing the *traveller's* position with the protagonists, experience the moving surroundings as what could be defined as perpetually promising tourism leaflets. Augé expands his discussion of the displacement of the *traveller* in relation to his surroundings through the notion of the "spectator in the position of the spectator [being] his own spectacle" (70). The *traveler*, through the projected imagery proposed by tourist leaflets, is offered, as stated by Augé, a "reversal of the gaze . . . his own image in a word, his anticipated, which speaks only about him but carries another name . . ." (70). This promise (or perhaps simulation) of a potential inscription of meaning, or creation of memory, conforms to the ongoing promise of a new (safe) space which could be inhabited, inscribed, and therefore transmuted into place, which is a dominant motif of *The Walking Dead* storyline.

The notion of the *traveller's* space as the archetype of *non-place* (Augé 70) deserves another look. In terms of Augé's definition *non-place*, in which relational, historical, and identity-related contexts can no longer be applied, it could be said that characters such as Grimes, as well as many others trapped in the post-apocalyptic moment, are forced to confront two separate *non-place* projections. The dominant one is the one that will assure survival, the dynamic movement of the perilously promising surrounding *non-places*. However, a conflict-based projection emerges between the characters and the past memories. The premise of the conflict between characters and the initial domestic space/place is constructed upon the potential emotional and subjective infusion of the described spaces. This infusion, present in the beginning, is still there, but it is limited by memory. To use Bachelard's words, "[The] memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home" (6), which severely disturbs the characters, now aware of the terminal mutation of their once safe place. Following once again Bachelard's notion of the house as a place which "shelters daydreaming . . . protects the dreamer, [and] allows one to dream in peace" (6), the characters are forced almost instantaneously to face their own displacement from active daydreamers into Augé's *travellers*, unconnected and alien to the once romanticized womb of safety.

The familiarity of the home, the safety of a house, the almost poetic romanticizing of the safety it provided, is now made completely sterile and distant due to the complete degeneration of the initial domestic space/place. The trigger for this is the unstoppable rise of the monstrous, which regardless of its indisputable *otherness* embodied in the decaying bodies of the walking dead, still retains the once known intimacy. As opposed to the many other genre-bound monsters and monstrosities, the zombie retains a particular intimate quality precisely due to its “re-birthing” context. Re-born in intimacy as someone’s spouse, sister, father or child, the zombie simultaneously embodies its monstrous nature, as well as the familiarity associated with the construction of a (home) place. The gravitational pull of the home therefore includes all of its elements of familiarity and memories, while the zombies, once family members and the living articulation of familiar surroundings, are now nothing more than walking dead memories, or, to use Bachelard’s terms, they are now walking dead spatial alveoli. The conflict therefore lies in the character’s need to deal with the remnants of a lost and now barren world, whose emptiness and sterility is not limited to the physical, or spatial dimension, but to an emotional one as well, achieving in such a way an ideal context for the construction of a *non-place*.

Controlling the Dead

What follows a complete (de)construction of a place is chaos. The characters, now placed in a distorted heterotopian projection of a world that once was, devoid of its former social constrictions, as well as fixed historical or emotional points of reference, are initially forced to face each other, but then, with the passing of time, and the increased necessity for the formation of some, at least apparent, social construct, they re-enter the process of claiming space and the later potential construction of place. In other words, using the perspective developed by Yi Fu Tuan in *Landscapes of Fear*, it may be said that the characters are trying to build both mental and/or material constructions, which represent components in the landscape of fear whose only purpose is to contain the chaos (6). Driven by the notion of strength and safety achieved through numbers, the now wandering group of survivors is constantly searching for larger groups of people, but also for a secure location where they could start rebuilding their “lives”. This is the moment that marks the beginning of the third spatial paradigm—the formation of what could be defined as a neoliberal construct, if not a proper neoliberal state. Following David Harvey’s debates regarding capitalism, globalization, and neoliberalism, an interesting observation can be made regarding the similarities between globalization—as a homogenizing system—and the post-apocalyptic spaces represented in zombie narratives.

The once diversified world is now unified in a unique paradigm of violence, while individualism, once moderated through various forms of consumerist “off-job control”⁵ (Chomsky 21), and now set free and raging together with individual

⁵ The control of the working segment of the population by controlling their free time, achieved through the implementation of various forms of consumerist practices, and allowing in such a way an uninterrupted influence of power, freed from the potential influences of the masses.

“rights” (regardless of how wild and inconceivable these might be within a civilized setting), is now becoming an imperative. The previously dormant and/or regulated violent behavior is now rising, much like the dead, and coming back to life, using the actual walking dead only as an opportune excuse. The behavioral norm is individualism at its worst, echoing in an eerie way Margaret Thatcher’s statement from 1979—“[. . .] there is no such thing as society [. . .] there is a living tapestry of men and women and people” (Keay). The similarities between the post-apocalyptic space and the formation of a neoliberal system extend to the attempts of the characters to establish a proto-society whose main purpose is the protection and accumulation of goods.

The formation of such a behavioral pattern can be observed through the activities of just about all of the characters present in the *Walking Dead* narrative. After Grimes’s departure from what was once his home, the storyline traces the fortunate reuniting with his family, briefly followed by a struggle over the control of a group of survivors. The conflict, simple in its purpose of defining the leader of the group, and complicated in its social context relevant for the story, indicates one of the issues that dominate zombie narratives, and in particular *The Walking Dead* series, and that is the issue of the restructuring of a post-apocalyptic society. The struggle over control, and the emergence of new entities projecting and creating new systems of power, resonates with David Harvey’s debate on neoliberalism beginning with his explanation of the inevitable re-introduction of class power. As Harvey states, “If neoliberalization has been a vehicle for the restoration of class power, then we should be able to identify the class forces . . .” (*Neoliberalism* 31).

However, “since ‘class’ is not a stable social configuration,” what neoliberalism has accomplished is a reconfiguration of what constitutes an upper class (31). Grimes’s example, as well as the examples of some other characters appearing later in the story, conforms to what Harvey defines as “‘traditional’ strata” that “managed to hang on to a consistent power base” (31). In the story, Grimes, a police officer before the apocalypse, retains the position of power and authority inscribed in the role of an officer, and symbolically articulated through the police uniform that he continues to wear even in a now de-contextualized world. Nevertheless, the creation and perpetuation of a new *upper class* is precisely what characterizes the *Walking Dead* narrative. Through the interaction of the numerous (anti)heroes in their attempts to define a commanding order, and actions of the murderous characters leading various (dangerous) groups, a new class order is established in disregard of the previous social or cultural norms.

An initial example can be observed in the attempts of the group led by Grimes to start building their new life first on a farm, attempting to create an agrarian utopia, and then later on within the walls of a prison complex. Once having the function of preventing people from getting out, the prison is now transmuted into a fort whose main function is to keep the zombies out. Additionally, the complex offers stretches of land that can be used for farming, therefore providing a possible system of self-sustainability. Simultaneously, the once established social order based on rules and

(self)regulations is rapidly vanishing, matching the social regression, and allowing for the strongest (and most capable) to rule over the rest. What this leads to is an increasing narrative focus on who is going to rule the group(s), or more precisely, what will become the acceptable amount of violence and distancing from the once existing social norms needed for the group to survive. The surrounding places, the now deconstructed prison, farm, or locations controlled by other groups of survivors, however, become subject to an interesting spatial turn, positioning these spaces into an oscillating limbo of purpose and use, but without the necessary emotional inscription needed for their transition into a place, contributing in such a way to a representation of a neoliberal spatial paradigm.

This potential “trespassing” or exploration of what is dominantly becoming the post-apocalyptic behavioral norm is particularly true for the various extremely militant and violent groups coordinated by characters such as the Governor and Negan. Both promoting themselves as progressive leaders in a now merciless world, they obtain a position of influence and power well beyond their pre-apocalyptic social status. However, the positive image is a complete farce, built on the corpses of those opposing them, or not conforming to their vision of the future. It is within the town of Woodbury, controlled by the Governor, or within the new world order envisioned by Negan, and implemented by his paramilitary forces, that we can look for additional founding moments of a neoliberal discourse. Both of these characters, each in his own way, construct a rhetoric based on notions such as liberty, the right to protect oneself, and in the case of this particular narrative, the liberty to exercise violence in order to improve one’s security or increase the amount of available goods (the ultimate form of wealth). However, the proposed and proclaimed liberties have certain limitations, or, as observed by David Harvey, “[g]overnance by majority rule is seen as a potential threat to individual rights and constitutional liberties” (*Neoliberalism* 66). Therefore, “Democracy is viewed as a luxury” (66) only possible under specific conditions. What is preferred as an alternative is a system favoring “governance by experts and elites” (66). Freedoms are therefore limited to either direct survival or the reinforcement of the powers that be, and they do not extend to the creation of alternative organizations or other types of social formations that could challenge the newly constituted power structures.

What follows is the structuring of a neoliberal spatial paradigm, premised on three separate elements. As stated by Harvey (*Neoliberalism* 2), the first notion is the stressing of individual entrepreneurial freedoms, which in turn means the dismantling of social or political regulatory structures. This is one of the main features of the post-apocalyptic world as portrayed in *The Walking Dead*. With only the personal interests of particular groups as potential regulatory guidelines, with no external supervision or control, individual entrepreneurial freedoms do not merely contribute to the construction of an extreme version of a neoliberal state; rather, they become its most prominent characteristic. Whether the analyzed actions are those of the supposedly “benign” group led by Rick Grimes or the explicitly violent acts committed by the group ironically named the Saviors and led by Negan, the presented behavior

of both groups is equally not extended towards anybody outside of the initial group. The second and the third aspects, as stated by Harvey (2), characterizing the neoliberal context, are the focus on private property rights and a free market, and the basic infrastructure provided by society which would guarantee the continuous existence of these two things. Both aspects are articulated in the analyzed narrative through the tendency of characters and groups to physically protect their private properties and to propagate “free market” through the simple use of violence. This is accompanied by an adequate infrastructure offered by the post-apocalyptic proto-society, consisting of the formation of larger groups of people as well as superior firepower.

It is from these elements that we can draw the conclusion that the space constructed by the surviving (anti)heroes conforms in structure to neoliberal space, or state. If we return once again to David Harvey’s reading of geography in relation to capitalism, we are told that capitalism “builds and rebuilds a geography in its own image” (*Spaces* 54). Harvey states that capitalism constructs a distinctive geographical landscape, spaces of transport, and communications, infrastructures and organizations, which facilitates the accumulation of capital during one phase, only to be torn down and reconfigured for further accumulation at a later stage (54). When this very specific spatial pattern is applied to the context of zombie narratives such as this one, what we are left with is a clear indication of the inability of any of the characters ever to succeed in regressing to the initial space-place binarity, or more precisely, to the proper construction of what they could claim as their place of home. When Rick Grimes says “We do what we need to do and then we get to live. But no matter what we find in DC, I know we’ll be okay. Because this is how we survive. We tell ourselves . . . that we are the walking dead” (*Them* 00:33:18-00:33:45), we become aware of the obvious *otherness* of the characters, primarily based on their use of violence. But in addition to that, we become even more aware of the inability of the now changed characters to emotionally relate to anything or anyone outside of their group. Their existence, now conforming to a neoliberal space and experience, and coinciding with the continuously moving map of neoliberalization, allows and forces them to experience always new spaces. Yet these spaces remain just that—spaces—defined by the unceasingly violent behavior of the characters whose incapability of any consistent inscription of meaning perpetually prevents them from the re-creation of place.

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