

LIFE AFTER PEOPLE: ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE AND THE STRUCTURES OF THE POST-HUMAN GLOBAL IMAGINARY

ADRIANA NEAGU¹

ABSTRACT. *Life after People: Zombie Apocalypse and the Structures of the Post-Human Global Imaginary.* The paper examines post-humanist representations in Anglo-American film productions from a perspective informed by global and hypermodern cultural theory. It is an enquiry into aspects of dystopian sensibility featuring in global cinema, which are seen as manifest in the prolific zombie genre of the post-apocalyptic strand. It is premised on the assumption that global society is endemically marred by a catastrophic horizon of expectation, whose most congenial form of expression is dystopia, a genre on the rise worldwide, especially productive in Anglo-American cinematic practice. Drawing on global cultural theory, I seek to narrow down the enquiry into dystopian modes and bring the zombie dominant to bear on what I construe as the post-apocalyptic imagination of globality.

Keywords: *post-humanism; dystopia; apocalypticism; 9/11; cinematography; global (dis)order; vampires; zombies; global theory; hypermodernity; disjuncture.*

REZUMAT. *Viața după dispariția omului : apocalipsa zombie și structurile imaginarului postuman în era globală.* Lucrarea analizează reprezentări postumaniste în producții cinematografice anglo-americane din perspectiva teoriei culturale globale și a hipermodernității. Demersul își propune să trateze aspecte ale sensibilității distopice manifestate în cinematografia globală, aspecte considerate reprezentative pentru filmele zombie din cadrul genului postapocaliptic. Premisa lucrării este dată de teza conform căreia societatea globală este caracterizată de un orizont de așteptare catastrofic, al cărei forme predilecte de expresie este distopia, un gen care înregistrează, în

¹ **Adriana NEAGU**, MA, MPhil, is Associate Professor of Anglo-American Studies at Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Department of Applied Modern Languages. She is the author of *Continental Perceptions of Englishness, Foreignness and the Global Turn* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), *Sublimating the Postmodern Discourse: Toward a Post-Postmodern Fiction in the Writings of Paul Auster and Peter Ackroyd* (Lucian Blaga University Press, 2001), *In the Future Perfect: The Rise and Fall of Postmodernism* (Lucian Blaga University Press, 2001), and of numerous critical and cultural theory articles. Dr Neagu has been the recipient of several pre- and postdoctoral research awards. Previous academic affiliations include University of Oxford, University of Bergen, University of Edinburgh, University of London and University of East Anglia. Contact address: <adriananeagu@lett.ubbcluj.ro>

general, o creștere spectaculoasă pe glob și, în special, în cinematografia anglo-americană. Demersul este fundamentat de o grilă teoretică ancorată în teoria globală și vizează fenomenul zombie perceput ca o dominantă a imaginarului postapocaliptic.

Cuvinte cheie: *postumanism; distopie; spirit apocaliptic; cinema; dezordine globală; vampir; zombie; teorie globală; hipermodernitate; disjunție.*

The zombie genre is ubiquitous in the postmodern apocalyptic landscape (in film, literature, graphic novels, video games, miniseries, etc.). This genre represents a postmodern myth which is resurrected again and again in various incarnations to embody a particular audience's current anxieties. As Bruce Lincoln notes in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*, myths "are not snapshot presentations of stable taxonomies and hierarchies" (Dailey-Bailey 1).

To a self-respecting scholar immersed in 'real', presumed consequential research matters, the very mention of the term 'zombie' will raise quite a few eyebrows, reading like a serious intellectual offense. Yet, currently the most basic of searches of the term in scholarly data bases hits a staggering 17,436 results. For this many papers to date to mention indeed take the trouble to concern themselves with the zombie phenomenon, it follows zombies are a manifesting, ongoing cultural production of significant currency, potentially a game changer at that, testifying to the existence of an 'authentic' zombie phenomenon out large. As an emerging, fast growing specialism, zombiology or zombie studies cover a relatively vast area, gravitating around the significance and symbolism of the walking corpse, come back from the dead:

The recent interest attached to the Zombie figure in Popular Culture did not come overnight. Stretching back to the early twentieth Century, with William B. Seabrook's 1929 novel *The Magic Island* and Victor Halperin's 1932 movie *White Zombie*, the Undead has gained wide recognition after George A. Romero's seminal 1968 film *The Night of the Living Dead*, whose main themes have been quickly replicated in the US and abroad by Romero himself, Lucio Fulci, and a handful of lesser-known directors. However, it is at the turn of the century that Zombies have progressively gained central stage in the Gotha of established popular monstrosities (Bishop 2006, 2010; Reed and Penfold-Mounce 2015). The Zombie theme has crossed the borders of cinema and spilled over to other media and arts, like literature, videogames and, most importantly for our purposes, TV (data are available, among others, in Drezner 2014). (Locatelli 2)

The zombie transfiguration from a locus-specific myth into a dominant motif of global popular culture is no doubt reflective of major changes in the mindset of the post-apocalyptic trend, pointing to a subject marred by the terror of the *revenant*:

As part of an extended family of horrific antagonists, zombies have offered bureaucratically managed representations of cultural anxiety for more than 80 years. To ignore these mass-mediated cultural representations of fear and terror is to ignore one of the largest and most enduring cultural sites in which thought and discussion of and about fear and terror occurs. Sociology – as a discipline designed to unearth the influences of economic, political, institutional, and social forces – is ideally equipped to unsheathe the broader significance of zombie culture and, thus, add to debates in zombie studies (cf. Dowd 1999, Sutherland and Feltey 2012, Tudor 2000). (Platts 548-9)

Contrary to what consumers of the genre may be inclined to believe, the anthropology and archetypology of zombies are vast and alembicated fields of study, involving a plethora of complex, imbricated typologies and taxonomies and relatively few viable comparisons. To the extent that they are humanoid, reanimated corpses returned from the dead and preying on the living, zombies resemble vampires, perhaps the closest, albeit not entirely likely analogy that comes to mind. Yet, unlike vampires, zombies are portrayed as day-and-night monstrous creatures typically moving around in hordes, whereas vampires thrive as independent, night creatures, living solitary lives and acting on their own. Endowed with superhuman powers, eternal youth and extra-ordinary looks, vampires are intelligent entities, alluring and terrifying at one and the same time, caught between this world and the hereafter, the embodiment of the quintessential figure of the immortal, whose sole enemy is sunlight and, according to some variations of the vampire myth, river-crossing. Zombies, on the other hand possess no sublimating quality, featuring as disposable, mindless, witless, barbarous mutants, certain to die out shortly after transformation. The lure of vampires transcends the fear they induce; zombies, on the other hand, are repugnant, abominable life forms inducing disgust and sheer terror, reminiscent of humans' inherent beastlike nature. The vampires' dual nature offers a fascinating insight into the dichotomies of human nature, the doctors Jekyll and misters Hyde lying dormant in the individual. Zombies' grotesque, coarse, 'in the face' brutality is devoid of any inspiring quality, its sole *rationale* being that of holding up a mirror to inhumanity, indeed to the posthuman extermination war, the association most often reiterated in cinematic productions.

To an even larger extent than in the case of the zombie figure, the genealogy of the vampire is an imbricated story meandering in various critical-creative directions, as *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead* -- a compendious, all-inclusive resource covering every conceivable manifestation of the undead and their representations in fiction-- copiously demonstrates. The volume traces vampires from Babylon and Assyria to ancient Greece addressing, among other, the unlikely connections between Christianity and vampirology resonant in the iconic *Nosferatu*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and its screen adaptations, as well as in *Addams Family*, *Buffy the Vampire*, *Interview with a Vampire*, *The Twilight* novels by Stephanie Meyer, and the film saga, in the author's phrasing, "riding the largest wave of vampire interest that there has ever been [...] the most comprehensive and exhaustive exposition of everything relating to vampires [...] keeping pace with the latest developments in the ever-expanding world of bloodthirsty undead" (Melton XIII). Contributing a mesmerizing breadth of knowledge on the subject, the compendium touches upon every conceivable aspect of vampirism, testifying to a whole 'vampire world' out there. Gothic literature, with its eerie atmosphere, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* has thrived in the representation of the vampire.

Fandom object as well as object of enquiry, the vampire has galvanized popular imagination throughout the centuries, generating a considerable degree of scholarship, as evident in the welder of vampire research centres and associations the likes of the Transylvanian Society of *Dracula*, The Vampire Research Society and Queens Vampire Research Centre. Fan practices point to an entire vampire subculture vividly present in comic book vampires and their outlandish protagonists such as Vampirella, vampress Luxura of the *Vamperotica* comics, or the *Vampyr* video game. The outcast or outlaw *par excellence*, the vampire is the "grand architect of all the dark, repressed urges in the human heart" (Melton XIII). Depending on the kind of energy they feed on, vampires are born or 'turned', energy vampires, psychic vampires, sexual vampires, emotional vampires, economic vampires, political vampires, the innumerable existing taxonomies being in themselves indicative of the myriad ways in which the myth taps into the occult beliefs of various cultures. Of the numerous types of documented vampire-like creatures, feeding off the life force of living creatures, literally draining the life out of the living: the *lamai*, the *empusai*, and the *mormoloykiai* together with a vampire witch referred to as *strige*, a night demon killing infants by sucking their blood are the most prominent.

The zombie *topos* in literature dates back to the Middle Ages, zombies being portrayed as demonic figures the church evokes to instil fear in the congregation and provide a sharp contrast to Christian spiritual and moral

values (Dondeynaz 26). With its origins in Haitian religion and Vodoun rituals, zombism is a phenomenon that agglutinates a crude, pathetic dimension of folk superstition, i.e. of 'zombification' through ingestion of 'zombie powder' or *fugu*, puffer fish. The zombie apocalypse projects a macabre end to humanity, extinction not by environmental cataclysm, but by cannibalism, the *homo homine lupus* scenario playing into man's starkest, deepest anxieties. The symbolical *locus* of the zombie in analytical psychology, possibly in the Jungian pattern of the shadow, of the repressed or disowned part of ourselves is highly suggestive of the deep-seated zombiemia/ phobia. Abhorrent, zombies, real and imagined are the 'monsters of the twenty first century' that tap into our wildest nightmare, that of losing our humanity and being colonized by the beast. In a logic stemming from the increasingly widening global disparities in economy, extreme inequality, power concentrated in a select few hands at the top, deregulation and civil rights, the zombie becomes a metaphor of global crisis. The enormity of the prospect of being lobotomized and led by a mindless, ruthless elite being fostered by the innumerable extreme narratives of globality:

Commonly understood as corpses raised from the dead and imbued with a ravenous instinct to devour the living, zombies address fears that are both inherent to the human condition and specific to the time of their resurrection. From an evolutionary perspective, zombies engender terror because of ingrained phobia of infectious contagion, loss of personal autonomy, and death (Clasen 2010).

From a cultural view, zombies represent a monstrous *tabula rasa* whose construction registers extant social anxieties (Bishop 2009, 2010; Dendle 2007; McIntosh 2008; Muntean and Payne 2009). In their modern form, zombie narratives commonly present apocalyptic parables of societies in the state collapse (or have already collapsed) wherein a handful of survivors receive claustrophobic refuge from undead hordes. The survivors' temporary rampart disintegrates not because of the zombies but because of the survivors' inability to cooperate despite their differences. Zombie narratives often rely on images of communal desolation, infected others, piles of untended human corpses, and roving gangs of vigilantes. (Platts 547)

Whereas sharing in common traits with the vampire revenant, the zombie figure therefore draws on a cultural logic considerably different from that of the vampire. Here, too typologies abound, zombiopedia listing categories such as: 'generic zombies', walkers, runners, Voodoo zombies, Romero zombies, gay zombies, carriers, crawlers, screamers, bonies, stalkers, spitters, exploders, bursters, ghouls, tanks, armored, melting et al. Eli Roth's documentary *History of Horror* further distinguishes among fast zombies, slow zombies, and comedy

zombies, the cultural affiliations of which branch off into countless variations of flesh and brain eaters. Types range from 'medical' or 'chemical zombies' infecting the living thorough blood, supernatural zombies, brought back by wizards through acts of magic, to scholastic categories such as 'Greek Zombies', a notion developed by Princeton psychologist Julian Jaynes, which foregrounds ancient Greeks as originally having *unconscious* minds. To these of course add the ambivalences at work in the zombies represented in North American cultures as opposed to the undead in various folkloric traditions.

Deceptively mimetic, the multifarious zombie categories that have mushroomed in popular culture over the last decades, come down to two major significant divisions, perhaps the only two relevant ones from a hermeneutical point of view: the supernatural, horror-movie zombie and the post-apocalyptic, futuristic, dystopian one, a genre shift in itself very significant, as Laios Brons aptly notes:

For reasons that are somewhat mysterious to me, zombie movies remain fairly popular. There has been a notable change in the genre, however. A few decades ago, zombie movies were probably best classified as a sub-genre of horror, while nowadays they seem to be a variety of disaster movie – particularly, a variety of the end-of-the-world disaster movie. Picking up on this subtle, but telling genre shift, Brad Evans and Henry Giroux write in *Disposable Futures*, a book on the role of (depictions of) violence in contemporary society that the zombie figure “speaks to a future in which survival fully colonizes the meaning of life, a future that both anticipates and consents to the possibility of extinction”. (Brons 1)

The morphing of the once marginal zombie figure into a mainstream global trope is indeed symptomatic of the extent to which zombyism has turned into a metonym for a collapsing, self-destroying society, and for the perceived threat of immigration. Discussing the sociological implications of today's zombie culture, Todd Platts illustrates how unlike traditional horror films, dystopian zombie films, whether parodies, such as *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright, 2004), or *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Burr Steers, 2016), humorous books like *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003), or dramas such as *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle 2002), or *World War Z* (Marc Forster 2013) thrive on a posthuman imagology to which infectious contagion and our ingrained fear of undead hordes are central.

That such stories should witness a resurgence in popularity after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the anthrax and SARS

scares, and Hurricane Katrina is seen as no coincidence (Bishop 2009, Newitz 2009). As Robert Wuthnow (1989, 3) argues, “if cultural products do not articulate closely enough with their social settings, they are likely to be regarded” as “irrelevant, unrealistic, artificial, and overly abstract, or worse, their producers will be unlikely to receive the support necessary to carry on their work”. (Platts 547).

Beyond their eschatological potential, zombie representations best capture the turmoil and confusion, indeed the state of ataxia emblematic of global disorder. As Yari Lanci points out, in “Subjectivation in Times of Apocalypse,” the ‘contemporary’ nature of the zombie phenomenon owes a lot to its capacity to encapsulate scenes of a derelict humanity thrown into disarray:

The relatively recent return of the zombie in various forms of media seems to mark a high point in its history – from the revival of the zombie theme in cinema productions since the beginning of the new millennium, to the increased number of TV series, comic books, and videogames on the same ‘undead’ topic. The horde of the undead has admittedly infected our collective imagination. As reported by Richard Seymour on his *Lenin’s Tomb* blog, during the riots in London in August 2011 many witnesses affirmed:

“it’s like *28 Days Later* out there.”⁵ Following the example offered by the director Zack Snyder in his 2004 remake of George Romero’s seminal *Dawn of the Dead*, it has apparently become easy to associate images of public urban disorders with the feeling of uncontrollable chaos with which many zombies narratives begin. (Lanci 26)

Across culture history, modern dystopias have envisioned all manner of anxieties, pre- and post-cold War, among these, fear of brainwashing, of indoctrination, of autocratic regimes and the total surveillance state, of extraterrestrial colonization, of the machine. In contrast, the zombie apocalypse is paradigmatic of global anxieties *par excellence*, of the fear of the anthropocene, of the extinction of the human race altogether, or rather, of its dehumanization and survival in beastly, mindless, in short zombified forms, hence the congeniality and plausibility of the genre in the twenty first century:

Along these lines, Kyle Bishop (2009, 18) observes, “Because the aftereffects of war, terrorism, and natural disasters so closely resemble the scenarios of zombie cinema [they have] all the more power to shock and terrify a population that has become otherwise jaded by more traditional horror films.” (Platts 548)

The nature of the anxiety embedded in the zombie apocalypse is what distinguishes the posthumanist dystopian imaginary from other dystopian modes. Unlike other postapocalyptic projections that render visions of the conquest or extinction of the human species by technology, atomic wars, or extraterrestrial forces, posthumanist dystopia, grounded as it is in anthropocene and fuelled by the age of terror, a new geological age, in which annihilation is not the ultimate scare; rather, it is the fear of survival in an 'undead' life form that mars the horizon of global man engendering the belief systems constitutive of the ethos and structures of the posthuman popular imagination. For the 'post-human', the stake is nothing short of phylogenetic continuity and the survival of the 'environmentally fittest'. In an analytical enquiry, Sabine Wilke approaches the anthropocenic stage in the history of humankind from the perspective of the theoretical humanities, calling for the need for a radical critique of what she calls the "normative framework for global environmental justice":

For over a decade now the idea of the Anthropocene, a new epoch of man, has been migrating. From its original context in the geological sciences to other academic disciplines, as well as into the popular imagination via magazines and other venues. While the approach developed in these debates is broad and includes perspectives ranging from the sciences to media and the arts, there have been only rudimentary attempts to develop a critique of the underlying assumptions of such a concept. I would like to outline the parameters for such a critique from the perspective of gender and race, postcolonial studies, and the need for a normative framework for global environmental justice. If humanity is indeed the force behind the changes on our planet, then the humanities are called to explore the new directions ahead of us, for they concern themselves with the study of intellectual creation and the critique of dominant narratives, myths, and ideologies, and the critical engagement with fundamental questions of meaning, value, responsibility, and purpose in a period of escalating crisis. (Wilke 67)

Wilke's is thus a recourse to the humanities as best placed to revisit Kant's transcendental philosophy, in so doing, taking stock of the developments and departures in the fundamentals of Cartesian metaphysics, intrinsic value and extrinsic knowledge. To begin developing such a critical perspective, we need to acknowledge the fact that the concept of the Anthropocene represents nothing less than a serious challenge to the basic axioms of Western metaphysics, specifically Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy (Kant [1781] 1855). Kant distinguished between that which we humans can know and what he calls the "thing in itself" (*das Ding an sich*) which cannot really be known by us. The thing in itself lies before and outside of thought and perception.

Human perception is limited to phenomena that become the object of our sensory perception. Kant's emphasis on the role of human subjectivity had an enormous influence on how the relation between humans and the non-human world was perceived and consequently constructed in terms of privileging human existence over the existence of non-humans. (Wilke 67)

Wilke's deconstruction of the Anthropocene and its articulations with humanocentrism provides one of the broadest reading keys to understanding the zombie renaissance and how it can be made to bear on issues pertaining to metaphysical doubt and alterity, calling into question new forms of intersubjectivity. The approach combines Kantian and environmental philosophy, shedding invaluable light on how the 'postman' relates to the non-human other:

If no direct connection can be established between pure ideas and objective experiences, we are left with a position that amounts to a transcendental anthropocentrism where objects are said to conform to the mind of the subject and then and only then have the ability to become products of human cognition. Post-Kantian metaphysics rests on this concept of a human-world correlate and it is this presumption that is radically called into question by the idea of the Anthropocene, for in the age of man all relations between humans and non-humans unfold within the realm of interconnectivity. (Wilke 67)

Lanci, who looks at the zombie trope from the vantage point of the political allegories underpinning it in global culture history, provides an equally insightful account of the ideologies, indeed the "zombified cultural framework" that fuels the zombie phenomenon:

In recent times, the zombie has been celebrated as the "official monster of our Great Recession." From the allegories and metaphors employed by different cultural theorists to describe neoliberal economics, to the wave of protesters who dressed as zombies to couple their explicit political discontent with a specific aesthetic figuration, the zombie aesthetic imaginary appears to have saturated many cultural and political discussions. (26)

Ironically, when viewed from the perspective of their political and politicizable potential, zombies acquire countercultural overtones, interpretable as parables of resistance:

However, besides the repetitiveness of this trope in cultural, political, and economic debates, [I argue that] the critical potential of the figure

of the walking dead has not been investigated thoroughly enough. The figure of the zombie could be further employed as a way of understanding our subjective position under a politico-economic framework dominated by neoliberal economics. This critical potential can be found in the relation between the metaphor of the zombie – considered here as referring to a determinate political subjectivation – and the representation of the end of the world so common in these narratives. (27)

Representations of the zombie in cinema and television underwent considerable changes since Romero's classic horror movie monster to the post-9/11 productions...the propensity of global man to conjure up end-times scenarios. As most film culture theorists are quick to point out, the revenant dominant gave way to the zombie as a site of contamination, epitomising the endemic fear of the spread of viral infection after the attacks at 9/11. The rise in the terrorism threat in post-9/11 context, gave a particular impetus to the zombie narrative, the zombie apocalypse emerging overnight as the kindred spirit of posthumanist dystopias. As Joseph LeBlanc indicates, zombie movies not only proliferated against the backdrop of the war on terror paranoia², but the zombie figure acquired valences associated with gay sex as a mode of cannibal murder:

Film and cultural theorists have long explored the horror movie monster as social commentary; for example, George Romero's zombie film series has been explained as critiques of miscegenation, consumer consumption, and the Cold War. This presentation suggests the new-found rise of the zombie narrative has found particular resonance in a post-9/11 world, where the figure of the zombie has shifted from the undead to the infected, conflating the AIDS pandemic, LGBTQ paranoia, and the newer rhetoric of terrorism. In particular, this presentation sees the zombie as a drag figure, representing an excess of death and contamination and its role in exposing a heteromasculine penetration paranoia during the War on Terror and the development – turning? – of a queer zombie epistemology. (LeBlanc 1)

A pioneering zombie apocalypse production in its own right, Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (screenplay by Alex Garland), is regarded as a genuine genre re-inventor. Drawing inspiration from Romero's formative, thriller-oriented mystery film, Boyle contributes to the genre complexities defining of the posthuman landscape, pushing the boundaries of social allegory:

² At the start of the year 2019 IMDB listed a staggering number of 1259 titles of movies featuring "zombie" as keyword.

Social allegories seem simplistic at a glance. They generally deal with topics and issues that have been discussed repeatedly (such as time, individualism and survival), and then branch off into multi-layered, ambiguous symbolism. They can range in tone from sarcastic and satirical to sinister and sorrowful. Many film genres today can be used as social allegories: the Western allegorically represents Vietnam War; but of all the filmic allegories represented in contemporary cinema, the zombie film as social allegory is perhaps the most pervasive and striking. (Bass 1)

Excelling in the sense of verisimilitude that it conveys, the story line gravitates around the outbreak of a rage virus triggered by the attempt of a group of animal rights activists to release lab apes. While depicting a credible picture of zombie infestation, the film is a disquieting exploration of the limits of civilization and the short day's journey into utter dehumanization. The protagonist, Jim wakes up alone in an empty hospital to a deserted, zombie-plagued London, 28 days after the outbreak of the virus. In a zombie-ambushed church, he comes across other survivors, Selena and Mark who come to Jim's rescue, together setting off on an extreme mission: staying alive. In the process, they discover a father and a daughter, Frank and Hannah barricaded in a hotel and join forces with them in an attempt to locate an army base whose radio signal they pick up. Boyle's sophisticated mise-en-scene poignantly comes to light in the film's remarkable gradation and powerful structure. Instead of the outcome one would expect, reaching the army base acts as a second start for the action, as Jim, Selena and Hannah, now the sole survivors of the group, experience revelations far more disturbing than the virus infestation. All credit to Boyle's unique sense of pace and defamiliarisation technique, striking from the very opening of the film. In a memorable nine-minute travelogue depicting Jim's awakening, Boyle conveys horrific scenes of a believable, post-catastrophe London frozen in time, buried in garbage and raided by psychotic monkeys and zombies. Powered by momentum building effects and a highly atmospheric variation of lighting, *28 Days Later* portrays images of desolation, solitude and despair, the intensity of which create great authenticity. As well as the emotion it generates in the viewer, the film is a morality tale that invites a timely reconsideration of nihilism and Darwinism from the perspective of global ethics:

28 Days Later could best be described as the thinking man's zombie movie" (IMDb). It is a postmodern, semi-nihilistic take on the genre. No longer are the zombies created from toxic waste that we settled for in the past, these zombies are the by-product of scientific experimentation on

our society. The establishing shot in the film begins with scenes of police brutality, global warfare, rioting, nuclear explosions, and supreme anarchy. The shot zooms out to show that these images are coming from a television in an animal experimentation lab. These heavy images are symbolic of how humans treat each other. It is, essentially, survival of the fittest. We are weeding each other out until there is no more existence. (Bass 3)

With the zombie pandemic explicitly as its subject, the right doze of gore and violence for the blood-thirsty and the usual attempt at an uplifting, meaningful ending, *World War Z* is a mainstream, typically Hollywood production managing little of the subtlety and complexity of *28 Days Later*. Chaos and panic wreak havoc in the lives of former United Nations employee, Gerry Lane and his family following the outbreak of an unprecedentedly virulent, lethal virus that turns healthy individuals into feral, rabid creatures eating the living alive. Making a narrow escape with his wife and two daughters in a stolen RV trailer, Lane is commissioned to investigate the pest and find a cure for what spreads at an alarming rate, threatening to destroy the whole of humanity. His task is to assist a renowned virologist, Dr. Andrew Fassbach, in identifying the source of the worldwide outbreak and develop a vaccine. Unremarkable in both the manner in which it develops the theme, and examines the circumstances and implications of a like pandemic, the film scores reasonably high in the element plausibility and atmosphere (what with the SARS and swine flu scares). The opening scenes, describing the general turmoil, the congestion in the Philadelphia traffic with helicopters circling all around, and the horde of freshly reanimated undead roaming around and attacking cars and pedestrians are quite effective in terms of creating suspense. No short of tension is also the depiction of abandoned tenements, visceral terror, and the encroaching site and range of devastation captured in fine, expressive detail. Narrower in scope, however, this is an action-horror blockbuster that recycles old clichés of the genre, picturing the military as essentially the ‘good guys’ and zombies as potentially perennial, viciously voracious and attracted to noise.

Marking an upsurge in the zombie pop culture, AMC’s *The Walking Dead* TV series (Andrew Lincoln, Norman Reedus, Melissa McBride, 2010), based on the novel by the same title, takes the zombie apocalypse theme to further eschatological levels in its representations of extremes of civilization, where survival is the only thing at stake. With 6 series aired and one currently in production, it has met with wide acclaim, contributing to what is shaping out as the global ‘zombie culture’. It tells the story of a group of survivors of a zombie apocalypse that seek to reconstitute whatever remnants of the lost

humanity they can. As well as presenting a rich typology of post-apocalyptic characters, the series is a vivid rendition of a posthumanist universe where, the disappearance of one of one's kind may be the end of that kind. Much *28 Days Later* it raises fundamental questions regarding power relations, political action and the global flows, in so doing, thematising 'life after people' in a posthumanist realm characterized by the total collapse of state institutions.

In final analysis, poetics and politics, epistemology and ontology, indeed conceivability and plausibility aside, the zombie trope in global fiction is increasingly omnipresent, contextualized to the current politics and fragmented, dislocated, and alienating nature of existence at a juncture in time when humans have turned redundant and the prospect of the species perpetuating in non-human forms is the ultimate, irreconcilable and irredeemable future.

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