9 'Warning! Zombies Ahead …'

Determinate negation, predatory capitalism and globalised place-making

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Introduction

Soon after the horrific attacks by Rudy Eugene, aka the Miami Zombie, a street sign warning 'Zombies Ahead' was posted on the 520 in Washington State by a humorous maintenance worker.[1] The seemingly possible potential of such an 'outbreak' reminds us of Adorno's trenchant warning that 'the world – which could be paradise here and now – can become hell itself tomorrow (1998, 14). While a zombie apocalypse was not upon us, the message captured the essence of contemporary society's intensified fascination with the zombie as an allegory of our future: how through the exploitation and destruction that we commit to ourselves, society, and nature, we come step-by-step closer to embodying this creature of horror. The zombie of today is no longer undead—it has evolved. And this evolution is inextricably linked to the social pathologies that have metastasised under the geopolitical and economic strictures of contemporary capitalism as it enters the phase of what we call predatory capitalism. This concept refers to the intensification of capitalist processes of surplus value extraction and accumulation: the ubiquitous pursuit of profit to the point that it consumes the system's very basis of reproduction. From the labouring zombie or mind-controlled slave of colonialism; to the ghoul of Romero's Golden Era that no longer laboured but could only mindlessly consume; to the fast zombie of today and its frenzied consumption that spreads like an epidemic across the globe; each phase of zombie evolution reflects our temporal fears of economic exploitation: from slavery, to consumption, and now predation. We aim to show how the zombie of popular culture not only reflects the production of these subjectivities under Western capitalism, but highlights the importance of social relations in resisting them.

Linking the zombie of popular culture to geopolitics and the construction of political narratives is not new. Serious survival guides have been written to meet the existential threat posed by zombies (Brooks 2003, 2006). Perhaps most telling is that the U.S. military has used zombies as a training tool, creating CONPLAN 8888 to combat the threat of an imminent zombie apocalypse (Lubold 2014). Popular culture has become a common sense site to challenge the elite spaces in which (geo)political imaginations are received, produced, consumed, and legitimised (Dodds 2006; Dittmer and Dodds 2008; Dittmer and Gray 2010). Given the rich allegorical content zombies provide in shaping perceptions and discourses

of threat, security, and surveillance, the zombie has become a useful pedagogical tool to assist in teaching International Relations (IR) Theory (MacDonald, Hughes, and Dodds 2010; Caso and Hamilton 2015). Some have advanced an ultra-realist or hegemonic narrative (see Drezner 2011; Blanton 2013), while others have been more critical of the allegorical purchase zombies provide by using it to challenge (rather than mirror) the discursive formation, identity constructions, and circulations of power in world politics (see Morrissette 2014; Hannah and Wilkinson 2014). The undead have similarly been used to interrogate the way power, human nature, and the colonisation of space and resources map on to geopolitical representations found in popular culture (see May 2010; Saunders 2012; Pasko 2015). With the mindless zombie knowing no limits nor self-restraint in its insatiable hunger, it is unsurprising that the zombie has become a trope in popular geopolitics for critiquing the current social conditions under capitalism's reign of consumption (see Shaviro 2002; Lauro and Embry 2008; Webb and Byrnand 2008). While popular culture can authenticate or reify representations of people, spaces, and places as 'mimetic of the real world' (Power and Crampton 2005, 197), it is also a site from where to resist these dominant geopolitical narratives, in spite of being shaped by them. It is this co-construction of popular culture and geopolitics (see Grayson in this volume) that allows the zombie to incarnate both the manifestation *and* critique of predatory capitalism. We later take up this challenge by using the zombie to highlight the importance of revivifying social relations as a way to resist zombification.

Zombies are political creatures precisely because they give visual depiction and bring forth the chaos of the very real violence hidden under the ideological veil of Western capitalism, as it moves into a peculiarly predatory phase. Our fascination with this macabre zombie genre is as potent as ever because, like all survivor-fantasies, it touches upon our deepest instinctual fears and social anxieties situated within existing social conditions. Through them we can process strategies of survival, fantasise acts of heroism or escape, and feel the solidarity of a close-knit community that we no longer experience, given the evisceration of social relations under predatory capitalism. The tragic endings of most zombie movies also help us develop coping mechanisms to deal with the inevitable mastery of consumption *over* us. In this way, what the zombie symbolically consumes is not simply flesh nor man-made borders (we can thank neoliberalism for the latter), but the *socius* itself. By externalising social deformation as mere horror-fantasy, the zombie paradoxically both blinds and reveals what we need to overcome: the erosion of social-life, arguably the most precious of all the world's resources. In the first two parts of this article, we posit the zombie as an allegory of the determinate negation of the human-being—of our uniqueness, will, labour, desires/needs *and* our intersubjective relations with others—under this global economic order. We then chart the changes of zombie physiology, behaviour, and narratives, in cinematic history showing how these reflect the transitions in global political economy—a movement in which the labouring zombie has been displaced by the ravenous horde of consuming ghouls in the last decade.[3] We conclude by speculating a (re)turn to 'the social', as the means to reverse this process of zombification.

Zombies and determinate negation

Zombies represent the determinate negation of human existence under the diminishing social relations of predatory capitalism,[4] an allegory of the deformation of even the most basic forms of human sociality. While the term 'predatory' has been used to describe material aspects of late capitalism—including deregulation, monopolisation, production of harmful goods, and exploitation of labour and the environment—we use it to emphasise how individuals and society writ large objectifies, hunts, and consumes, with absolute non-reflexivity. Predatory capitalism is marked by the pauperisation of the very consumers it needs to satisfy its incessant drive for profit, by how it ruptures the moral fabric of formal civil relations essential for its function, and how it destroys the natural environment necessary to sustain itself. This represents an acute stage of crisis of capitalism, where it can no longer expand into new markets, but faces a declining rate of profit that it cannot solve under the weight of the dead ideas of neoliberalism. Its only option is to devour itself. Hence the increasing push towards monopolisation and corporatised state structures to facilitate market *capture* over market *creation*. Coupled with these economic contradictions is the deterioration of socio-political life in which polarisation within states is matched by greater recourse to violence and imperialism between them. This parasitic metaphor articulates what Fromm would have called a culturally patterned defect or what Honneth would call social pathology. In this new horrific vision of the future, Hobbes' 'war of all against all' is retained but recast as some rapturous End Time, in which subjective caprice—and the pursuit of its satisfaction—is mistaken as freedom itself. An apocalyptic 'end of history', the zombie horde gives representation to the zenith of predatory capitalism that, finally, consumes its own makers in some orgiastic war of all against all.

Hegel was one of the first to consider the implications of an intersubjective politics contingent upon our social relations with others. In Hegel's dialectical system, *negation* highlights the relations of opposition and difference. It is through the process of negation that ideological representations which have become habituated or static are met with their contradictions and sublated (*Aufhebon*): a movement that preserves and overcomes in ways that supersede the contradiction. Adorno's correction of the dialectic—away from an emphasis solely on its affirmative traits in which change always issues in unity and coherence—is also necessary to understand the reflective relation between predatory capitalism and contemporary zombie films. Insofar as *Negative Dialectics* reconfigured the unity of Hegel's dialectic (see, especially, Adorno 1973 [1966]), it sought to overcome the domination of object by the subject, rendering the zombie a particularly well-suited motif for describing contemporary capitalism. For Adorno, determinate negations are those that identify specific contradictions in society that are otherwise covered up, misunderstood, or obscured by identitarian thought—the type of thought that imposes unity or homogeneity on to the object. In so doing, identitarian thought supresses all difference and heterogeneity in the object, which Adorno labels 'the nonidentical'. While the zombie gives effect to human immiseration

under capitalism—where consumerist drive exceeds capabilities of thought, empathy, and sensibility—the zombie is peculiarly suited to unlocking the nonidentical that has been subsumed under identitarian thinking.[5] That is, the zombie is symptomatic of the contemporary human-being and the evisceration of social relations that cannot be expressed in existent conditions dominated, as they are, by the profit motif and exchange principle. For Horkheimer and Adorno:

> determinate negation does not simply reject imperfect representation of the absolute, idols, by confronting them with the idea they are unable to match. Rather, dialectic discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth.
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> (1994, 17–18)

For Adorno, thought can only have access to the nonidentical via conceptual, representational, or aphoristic criticisms of false identifications. These determinate negations that identify contradictions covered up by identitarian thought offer indirect expressions of those aspects of society misidentified by such thought. As argued by Zuidervaart, 'the only way to expose these antagonisms, and thereby to point toward their possible resolution, is to think against thought – in other words, to think in contradictions' (2011, sec. 5, par. 9).

By pushing contemporary capitalism to its dialectical extreme, the zombie movie therefore performs this radical function by exposing—albeit hyperbolically—the very real limits of contemporary capitalism. Take Gunn and Treat's account as an example. Following the Althusserian notion of the pre-ideological subject, they find that the undead of Romero's films illustrate the 'individual who has yet to become self-conscious or called into the service of larger social organization, community, or state' (Gunn and Treat 2005, 155). They observe in the labouring zombie the obverse of the Kantian subject who is 'gloriously autonomous and independent of the socius' (2005, 165). Yet they are only half right, for while the zombie clearly lacks the autonomy capable only of a rationally directed will, the zombie is a radicalised example of what being 'gloriously independent' of the social is. With no familial, community, or ethical bonds; with no normative prescriptions/proscriptions governing their behaviour; with no intersubjective recognition or communication with others, they heed their internal drives for consumption without any moral restraint. Zombies then, are not the obverse of the liberal subject, but its sublime manifestation.

Understanding the zombie as the determinate negation of human social relations under predatory capitalism reveals how our frenzied consumption is based on the predation of others and how this predation severs social relations, creating a swirling mass of isolated, atomised individuals. The antagonism generated by the push for consumption and profit is shown in zombie films to lead to either the annihilation of society under an asocial mass of violent consumers (the zombie horde), or nihilistic struggles in which a handful of survivors seek out an existence at the fringes of society. Arguably, Acevedo (2016) would identify both as manifestations

of the hyper-individualisation of what he calls the 'zombie factor'. The humanity of the zombie can never be reclaimed in this framing, and neither can our own, given both reflect worlds where people are no longer social creatures but atomised entities acting in isolation. But how did we fall so far from the socius for the zombie to reflect our fears in this manner? To understand this, we have to trace the evolution of the zombie in popular culture—something that reveals a startlingly close relation between our collective fears of the zombie and the changes in world capitalism.

Cinematic zombies in the history of modern capitalism

By taking an historical approach, we can observe how the changing threats of market forces have been reflected across the cinematic history of the zombie genre (see Table 9.1). As argued by Shaviro, 'zombies present the "human face" of [the] capitalist monstrosity' (2002, 288) and as capitalism changes and is experienced differently (temporally, spatially, and subjectively), so too do the nightmarish visions it gives rise to in the collective conscious translated into film (see McNally 2011). We are not concerned with the fear of mortality, the horror of rotting or consuming human flesh, or the metaphysical conundrum of an undead being that exists in a shell of decaying matter. Rather, we seek to draw out what

Table 9. 1 The changing physiology of the zombie at different stages of capitalist development

Timeline	Zombie evolution	Changes in capitalism	Development in popular culture and film (exemplars)
1920–1940	Labouring zombie	Fear of eternal 'undead'; slavery/fear of the Master (*Bokor*) and becoming the colonised subject; continued theme of slavery, fear of reverse colonialism, racism	*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920); *White Zombie* (1932); *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936); *Things to Come* (1936)
1940–1960	Decline of the zombie	Golden age of Bretton Woods System and fear of external threats to decline of domestic economy	*King of the Zombies* (1941); *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943); I *Walked with a Zombie* (1943); *Zombies of the Stratosphere* (1952)
2000–2013	Quick zombie	Predatory capitalism	*28 Days Later* (2002); *Shaun of the Dead* (2004); *Land of the Dead* (2005); *I am Legend* (2007); *Zombieland* (2009); *World War Z* (2013); *Walking Dead* (TV series 2010–present)

studies in literature typically overlook through their triangulation between alleged universal human fears, local cultural conditions, and the peculiarities of individual identity that are assumed to explain the appeal of the horror film (see Boyd 2009). What is missing is an account of the deformation of social relations under the different forms of capitalist development that reveals itself to be the truly horrific aspect of the zombie film throughout history. As we show, the precise attack on social relations shifts at different stages of capitalist development and this is reflected in the changing physicality of the zombie and the vulnerability of the social world to this threat.

The original Haitian zombie was no villain, but a victim of the most pitiable form of exploitation imaginable: slavery from beyond the grave. These re-animated corpses were controlled through powers known only to *Bokors* or evil *Houngans*, and were directed to fulfill specific purposes. In Vodoun belief, it is said that upon death the second part of the soul—the *ti-bon-ange*—that holds the individual qualities of a person—can be captured by those with knowledge to do so. There are two forms of woeful creatures that result: the *zombi astral*, a dead soul without a body never allowed to achieve final rest, and *duppy* or *zombi*, a dead body without a soul, forced to undertake specific commands, typically slave-labour or to harm someone else (send *a mort*) (see Boon 2011). That the *duppy* can take the form of an animal (see Leach 1961, 207), and the etymology of the term 'duped' originates from the dull-witted hoopoe bird (*de huppe)* in seventeenth-century France, when Haiti was under French rule, is of great significance. Though the etymology is difficult to trace, the connection to the contemporary meaning of 'being duped' is clear, particularly of being cheated or manipulated to someone else's will. It was this second type of creature that possessed the character Cesare to commit a series of murders in the first zombie movie—and classic of German expressionism—*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). The *Bokor* is the willing agent of slavery, serving the interests of those who could pay for their secret knowledge—the elites of post-revolutionary Haiti, or its plantation owners and colonial masters before 1791—and use it for the purposes of social control. From its earliest origins, the legend of the zombie was therefore one that coalesced around the machinations of the horrors of economic exploitation: specifically, the fears of slaves manipulated by governing elites to cajole this potentially mutinous population into acquiescing to chattel slavery, rather than the marginally worse conditions of 'undead slavery' for eternity.

How zombies of Haitian Voodoo were depicted in early film was, of course, highly disaggregated from the colonial experience: the story had been appropriated and bastardised for Western audiences (see Sheller 2003). The first zombie movies followed narrative patterns centred on the labouring zombie, voodoo ritual, and exoticism (geographic, racial, colonial and sexual in account). In *White Zombie* (1932) the tyrannical sugar mill owner populates his Haitian factory with the slaves of his enemies' walking corpses and is contracted by the wealthy plantation owner to transform a woman into a zombie, so she can 'perform his every desire'. In its sequel, *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936), a curious re-writing of history occurs through which the origins of zombification are transferred to Cambodia

even though the theme of the mastery of labour remains. Its more concealed pro-jection, however, is the fear of the white master being turned into an uncivilised, unthinking, colonial subject and labourer. What distinguishes these early zombie films from those of contemporary cinema is that zombification and the attacks of zombies upon humans are highly personalised and directed. Moreover, the white victim of zombification is to be readily sympathised with and the process of their transformation something to be prevented; 'saving the innocent' (usually a Western, hapless female) drives the entire plot structure. This personal side of zombification and the attempt to arrest its degenerative process on a loved one, would be replaced with the anonymity of the zombie of modern cinema, which their human biology and individuality is completely erased. This marks a dra-matic shift away from solidarity with the afflicted.

From the mid-1930s, the zombie film expressed fears of fascism and a loss of social control that followed shifts in the geo-strategic interests of the democratic West. While the location of the zombie is transferred from the colonial sphere to Germany, the thematic fear of the loss of free-will is retained, as is the purpose-fully directed labouring zombie controlled by a master. The adaptation of H.G. Wells' book *Things to Come* (1936) was aired in the year the Nazi's reoccupied the Rhineland. As a thinly veiled warning of the threat of Nazi domination, part of the story involves a plague of the 'wandering sickness' that is unleashed on the survivors of a decades-long international war, a plague that can only be cured by shooting the infected. In *King of the Zombies* (1941), made before America's entry in WWII and therefore taking all precautions as to not to refer to Nazi Germany directly, the villain is a spy from 'a government of Europe' who employs zombi-fication to acquire war intelligence. A far less inconspicuous condemnation of Nazism was given in *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943), in which a mad scientist is attempting to create a zombie army for the Third Reich. Although these films retain the same fear of the loss of free-will as the labouring zombie of classic cinema, it is a specific loss of cognition/consciousness, shifting from the direct enslavement by another to one in which individual free-will is subsumed under a 'common mind'. This theme of struggling against a soulless-collective reflected geopolitical fears, appealing to American audiences from 1930s to the height of The Red Menace in the late 1950s.[6] However, while these external threats led to the proliferation of alien films in the 1950s, there were, in contrast, few zombie films produced in this same time because, at least for American audiences, this period bore minimal fears about the domestic economy from *internal* threats.

The existential threat of what Gunn and Treat label the 'consuming ghoul' (2005, 155) expresses very different social pathologies to the zombie of classical cinema that defined the 'Golden Era' of zombie films (1968–1983). No longer commanded by a master, they do not make highly personalised attacks of the labouring zombie, but are now 'pure, motorised instinct' (*Dawn of the Dead*, 1978). Instead, the ghoul's slow but indefatigable advance, *en masse*, has a 'socio-logical purpose behind it'—an attack on 'the sins of modernity' (Koven 2008, 24). Rather than the vacant stare of the automaton obeying the commands of its mas-ter, the consuming ghoul is part of a ravenous horde that follows the dictates of

unreflexive consumerism. What elicits fear is not slavery to a master, but the potential reversal of this process: of being made the subject of consumption by another, and, more subtly, the fear of not being able to compete effectively against others. Hence, the paradigm shift in the zombie physiology and its behaviour reflect the relevant position of the affluent West in the geopolitical and economic struggles maintaining the Core/Periphery divide. The zombie, here, is a mirror held to Western consumerism as it preys upon peripheral economies. Romero's ghouls are no longer possessed, but only retain a desire to consume—the sub-conscious recognition of the costs of the West's consumption (desire) being turned against itself, to be either ripped open and consumed or, to be turned into something 'like them'. The latter is perhaps the more dreaded, suffering all the ignominies and inequities of being placed in the Periphery—a place where you can only mill aimlessly outside shopping malls full of goods that you once pro-duced, but can no longer access (*Dawn of the Dead*, 1978)—all the while being the subject to the violence and brutality as the 'humans' seek to regain control. The consuming ghoul reminds us of the facets of Western society complicit in exploitation and cruelty and reveals how we dehumanise others and how such processes have now infected ourselves in the Core. The fear is always there, the fear of what Chang (2005) would call having the ladder kicked away beneath you and falling back into the ranks of the zombie horde.

The fact that zombies have undergone yet another series of radical physical and behavioural changes since the ascendency of neoliberal orthodoxy is unsur-prising. Beginning with the film *28 Days Later* (2002) (and its sequel), continuing throughout a host of Romero remakes in the last decade, as well as the veritable explosion of low-budget, amateur, and online films in the last few years, zom-bies have gained intelligence and are far more physically daunting predators. No longer decaying, grey-faced, lumbering beasts but frenzied and swarming enti-ties, driven by pure rage. The script has been altered: infection is typically viral, outbreaks are nearly always the responsibility of either the Military Industrial Complex or government experiments, and the expected bleak conclusion is no longer a certainty with some films even ending with positive signs of hope, such as *28 Days Later* (2002), *I Am Legend* (2007), *Made Out Alive* (2009), and *Planet Terror* (2007).[7] It would be wrong, however, to see this change as merely a ques-tion of increased speed and power. Rather, what underlies this shift is the change in consumptive patterns, both social and environmental. The predatory zombie is symptomatic of our behaviour in the face of predatory capitalism: aggressive, unthinking, consumers. Even in the comedy *Zombie Strippers* (2008), strippers are compelled to become zombies due to consumer preference—the human can no longer compete. Bereft of older forms of sociality, we now view *all* others as zombies, either victims of our cruelty or our consumption. This is reflected in the distanced and atomised responses to the detritus of modernity, whether the poor, the immigrant, or the 'Third World'—all those who struggle because of neces-sity—who are deemed to be individually responsible for their position, rather than acknowledging the systemic causes behind their destitution. Wood observed that zombie and some slasher horror movies represent 'the consequences of the

dominant social order taken to their logical extreme' that such movies 'only carry to its logical conclusion the basic (though unstated) tenet of capitalism, that people have the right to live off other people' (1979, 21–22). Here, the zombie film continues to be an unswerving means to reveals our complicity in these horrific actions of the consumption of others.

The key difference is that the quick zombie is the acceleration of this same tenet identified by Wood. While the zombie continues as a visceral threat to personal security, in this new secularised apocalypse the source of existential fear is the evisceration of societal and civil life under predatory capitalism. It is no longer the slow march of the zombie-ghoul, but the headlong rush toward the precipice of social destruction. This should not be mistaken as a quantitative change in the nature of capitalist appropriation of labour or environment, but the *intensification* of this appropriation. The bodily actions of today's zombie are so virulent because our exploitation of others has intensified in kind and these films capture the ensuing social disintegration. Individual zombies are now threatening rather than the swarming mass, and the non-reflexivity of the maximising consumer is replaced with a driven rage that cannot be reasoned with or redirected.

At the same time, the survivors of today's cinema show a peculiar lack of sociality and their solutions are rarely cooperative joint ventures. We see this in *Survival of the Dead* (2009), where the members of the National Guard believe they 'are better off on [their] own' and are 'looking for a place where there was no "them",' a 'no place'—a clear swipe at the concept of Eutopia. Similar critiques can be laid against *I am Legend* (2007) and *World War Z* (2013), where the protagonist, despite being on a mission to save humanity, is the lone man pitted against the world. Above all, these narratives fortify the belief in atomisation, that the individual—and the individual alone—is all that can be relied on for survival; we truly have been *duppyed*. There is no socius to turn to because solidarity has itself been consumed. This reflects broader problems associated with predatory capitalism, but also it shows the way out of the problem as we shall see in the last section.

Zombies and predatory capitalism

As we have seen in the previous section, the evolution of the zombie corresponds to the shifting perceptions of threat within a changing global, political economy. The application of this insight shows how zombies can be a very effective and popular means to communicate the intersecting influence between the practices of political institutions, society, the world economy, and geopolitics (see, especially, Hall 2011). The limits of analysis of those working in this area however, lies not in their interrogation of the problems of contemporary political economy, but in the prescriptions for how such contradictions are to be overcome. For example, Chris Harman's analysis identifies zombie capitalism as an increasingly disordered and potentially violent world, breeding economic crisis, wars, and environmental calamity. For Harman, zombie capitalism 'cannot survive

without more labour to feed it, just as the vampire cannot survive without fresh supplies of blood' (Harman 2009, 349). John Quiggin identifies zombie capitalism as an unstable system breeding inequality, wherein the 'rich get richer and the poor go nowhere' (2010, 152, 13ff). He asks us to break with the 'dead economic ideas' related to market autonomy that were killed by the Global Financial Crisis and yet, somehow, live on. Similarly, Giroux refers to the 'casino capitalist zombie,' in which competition becomes social combat, war becomes a legitimate extension of politics, and people become redundant under the mantra of Social Darwinism (2011, 2). What typifies this rule of the 'living dead' is the dismantling of all 'social relations that embrace the common good', whilst breathing life back into financial institutions 'even when it appears that the zombie banks and investment houses have failed one last time' (Giroux 2011, 2). Yet the solutions proffered by each theorist do not adequately deal with the contradiction their analysis has unveiled. For Quiggin, the task is to return to another dead idea, this time Keynes. Giroux's list of political demands includes limited benefits to child welfare, federal job programmes, affordable housing and national health insurance (not health*care*). Under these Obamaesque political goals, Giroux leaves intact the structural conditions that led to the zombification he so derides. Even Harman, who goes the furthest, calling for a global unified proletariat (2009, 335–336), says little regarding the social relations necessary to sustain this community of solidarity, besieged as such relations are by the very economic structures he describes.

The early work of Baudrillard seems to explain the social disintegration accompanying predatory capitalism more keenly than these more recent engagements. In *Consumer Society*, Baudrillard predicted 'violent eruptions and sudden disintegration' that '*will*' come' to wreck this 'white mass' and its penchant for consumerism (1998, 196, emphasis added). He described this process as symptomatic of conditions in which alienation had become so absolute that individuals could neither perceive their own true needs nor alternate ways of life (1998, 198ff). For him, when everything is a commodity that can be bought and sold—even life itself—the totalising tendencies of capital have triumphed, and transcendence becomes impossible. For Baudrillard, this portends not sublation to something potentially 'better,' but social collapse. In this context, the zombie or consuming ghoul of contemporary cinema is a perfect symbol: the endpoint of human devolution as zombification becomes not an aberration, but the norm, as society implodes from the complete erosion of ethical life. And yet, just like Harman, Quiggin and Giroux, Baurdrillard fails to offer any solution, as is well-known, he never developed a theory of agency or change from which the determinacy of capitalism could be overcome.

So, while many have made good use of zombification as an analytical device to highlight the contradictions of late capitalism, they offer little to reverse this process. Unsurprisingly, this lack of viable, imaginative ideas is conjoined with the imposition of austerity to the problems of Western consumption. Such authoritarian responses refuse to re-engage with the social, but hold-fast to atomisation, intensifying it. Consumption is not reduced but is restricted to

an elite who consume greater and greater amounts (*Land of the Dead*, 2005). Accompanying this is violence that can emanate from the state or the private-sphere to protect this privilege. As Younge (2012) writes, 'Neoliberal globalisation, and the inequities that come with it, cannot exist without force or the threat of it … [because] the system is set up not to spread wealth but to preserve and protect it, not to relieve chaos but to contain and punish it'. Quoting Friedman, 'The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist' (Younge 2012, par. 7).

These things that appear to us as isolated phenomena of the excesses of capitalism are, in fact, geopolitical representations of a global pathology. For example, the decapitations and massacres taking place throughout the Mexican border-towns are a signpost of a future that continues to follow the trajectory of predatory capitalism: gangs battling for market supremacy in some hyper-violent form of monopolisation; ineffectiveness, corruption, and even destruction of state forces, both civil police and military; direct targeting of individuals and groups who oppose the banditry and the authoritarian methods of the state or the gangs; killing those who resist or attempt to wean themselves off the products of consumption; terrorising communities into submission or complete isolation; and increased surveillance and militarisation of domestic life, without meaningful development in social relations of security. The fact that this conflict is centred around control of the cocaine trade is almost irrelevant, as the same logic of predation applies to nearly *all* forms of commodification under Western capitalism, whether that be the brutal mining extraction processes in Ok Tedi, Ogniland, Marikana, Puno and Bagua; TRIPS and 'Big Pharma' that stifle generic competition, as millions die needlessly waiting for patents to expire or for prices to fall; the triumvirate of automotive, oil, and rubber industries, whose narratives actively stifle meaningful climate change policy, despite irrefutable evidence of anthropomorphic climate change. The ideal of 'security' is reduced to mere containment. Problematic 'zones' are sealed off and quarantined, with the poor corralled into ghettos and slums, only to be obtrusively surveilled and policed—not to keep them safe but to keep them *in*. The gated communities walling the rich away from the have-nots are subsequently replicated in refugee detention centres and military compounds across the globe, erected in the name of border security by the state, and all servicing the same logic: securing the predation of the many by the few. The only difference is scale. We see this quarantining mentality in the television series *Walking Dead* (2010–present), where protagonist Rick Grimes leads a group of survivors to take refuge in the farmhouse, an industrial prison complex, then a town. All are retreats relatively cut-off from the world, but the same problem always resurfaces. The unsubtle parallels to the geopolitical strategies of Israel in *World War Z* (2013) is another example of the absolute failure of any attempt to segregate the living from the undead. The fact that Trump's campaign was based around 'compelling' Mexico to fund and erect a border Wall for their own quarantining—and threats of increased tariffs and visa removals to enforce it—is where life moves beyond the mimicry of art.

On returning to 'the social', or 'We are all pulling in different directions' – (**Day of the Dead***, 1985)*

Since the late 1960s, the zombie horde and the survivors have embodied the struggle between the consuming and toiling masses in a tale of fallen humanity. Yet as they kill each other, the source of their relational deformation is never healed, the general loss of social relations. As we know from the mostly bleak endings of Romero's films, resistance is futile if it remains trapped by the old ways of thinking (esp. *Day of the Dead*, 1985). Yet, as we have been 'duped' out of our sociality under the continuing ideological assault of individualism and con-sumerism, zombification is the inevitable outcome of the belief that we are alone, Thatcher's twisted ideology that is 'no such thing as society'. Under this atom-ising ideology, geographic space, cultural relativity, and time, all provide con-venient foils to burst our ethical responsibilities to one another; our indifference to the horrors that occur daily in the slums and favelas are atrocities committed only *'over there'*; our exploitation of labour in the developing world (including of minors) is something *'they'* are responsible for; our complicity with colonial-ism and slavery is relegated to the work of past generations *'back then'*. We deny our complicity in predation; at the same time we increase our consumption. The plot twist: in order to sublate the process of zombification through a return to the social, we must first, in Adornoesque negative dialectic fashion, turn to the noni-dentical, to the *lack* of the social. The trick is to position critique in the actual sites of suffering under predatory capitalism to expose the damage these do to social relations. Our doom is inevitable only if we continue to denigrate and destroy all social relations in the name of consumption and profit. This is the redemp-tive promise of the zombie movie, but one that is rarely articulated: how can we reclaim the humanity of the zombie?

It is this question that we hear least of all. Often it is lost through the hyper-violence of the zombie film, not merely the gore associated with the hordes sur-rounding a hapless human victim, but that played out *by* humans towards the zombies. From the hit and runs, snipers, and shotgun blasts, extended most in *28 Weeks Later* (2007) to wholesale city-wide incineration—the ethicality of such violence when directed at the zombie is rarely questioned. Ethical claims to a former shared humanity are lost. Our inability to deal relationally with zombies belies our real lack of reflexivity. In the 2008 remake of *Day of the Dead*, one of the characters is told to run the zombies over. When someone appeals, 'They are still somebody!' the response is, 'Not anymore'. The effacement of the zombie's humanity, and our inability to reclaim it, is a failure of recognition, giving sign to the basic pathology in intersubjective relations. This is why the solution to the zombie outbreak or apocalypse remain so one-sided. Their humanity is lost, or can no longer be recognised, through being undead or contagious. Their radical criminalisation follows from their dehumanisation. After all, if they were human, they could—at least in theory—be returned to their human form, cured, or at least remembered, for their former human lives. Arguably, it is this theme of socialisa-tion that is beginning to emerge in films such as *Warm Bodies* (2013)—though

such films remain far from the norm. When the human survivors extinguish a zombie, they are in effect murdering the possibility for them to return to their humanity. This makes a counter-point to any number of forms of contemporary dehumanisation-criminalisation nexus: those jurisdictions that retain the death penalty and consider such criminals so inhuman that they can be exterminated with no guilt attached to social processes of justice; the treatment of terrorist suspects in the legal limbo of Guantanamo, and the acceptability of rendition, assassination, and even torture against those merely suspected of terrorism.

Yet if zombies are shades of their former human selves they can be redeemed, and it is this motif that is uniquely captured in both the novel *I am Legend* and its 2007 film adaptation.[8] Richard Matheson's 1954 novel is set in post-apocalyptic Los Angeles, where a pandemic has either killed or mutated everyone on Earth, bar the main protagonist, Robert Neville, due to an immunity.[9] Neville's mental health deteriorates as he struggles with loneliness and depression in what Clasen calls 'a speculative account of what happens when basic human needs are suppressed' (2010, 315). Years of an alienated existence are finally interrupted when Neville discovers fellow survivor Ruth. However, he soon learns that Ruth is a member of a group of infected survivors desiring to rebuild a 'new race' society, albeit a brutal one. Worse still, they had sent Ruth to supplicate him. They anticipated his all too human need for contact and recognition. This is why Neville never gives himself up to the vampires, not merely because of his immunity, but because 'without knowing what it was to love and be loved' was itself 'a tragedy more terrible than becoming a vampire' (Matheson 2006 [1954], 68). Nevertheless, there are stark similarities between this new vampire race and Neville. The vampires do not merely want to feed on Neville—they are not blind predators—rather, they subject him to trial and death for crimes committed against their people. It is here we realise the cause of their aggression was not simply the desire to feed, but the need for recognition—'Their need was their only motivation' (Matheson 2006 [1954], 11). It is telling that recognition theorists, from Hegel to Taylor, have made the same claim: that recognition is a 'vital human need' (Taylor 1992, 26). We find the same claim to humanity in the closing scene of the 2007 film where, upon finding a cure to the infection, Robert Neville pleads with the vampires to 'Let me save you!' Indeed, the alternative ending takes this concept of recognition one step further, when Neville realises it is not him they are after, but the female vampire he had been experimenting on to find a cure. After Neville surrenders her to the lead vampire, the two tenderly embrace one another. Made aware of their shared human capacity for love, Neville humbly apologises. After all, the only thing that sustained him through his years of isolation was this fundamental search for connection.[9]

Across the zombie genre, it is telling that asociality is what typically dooms the survivors. Instead of a turn toward sociality or an egalitarianism formed under social stress that would seem to offer more safety to the group, we usually witness further atomisation. As some twisted allegory of the deformation of freedom in late capitalism, survivors mirror the pursuit of one's self-interest in complete isolation from ethical life. They kill zombies without reflection; they save their

own skin without relation. Yet only the strong survive through their own individual cunning which is precisely how Hegel expressed individual behaviour in the market. But in their struggle for survival they become deformed and inhuman, with few exceptions. The greatest threat is not the zombie, but the inability to reflect on the deformation of social relations that both causes and perpetuates the predation of one upon the other. As Paffenroth observes, the specific cause of the zombie outbreak is rarely important, for the movies are 'always about some small group dealing with the effects, not the causes' (2006, 3). This shows an endemic weakness in the reflexive capacities of individuals within late capitalism who are only capable of immediate short-term pursuit of self-interest and self-preservation, lacking the political ability, social awareness, and imagination, to grapple with the causes of social decay. This is the phenomenon described by Horkheimer as the *Eclipse of Reason* (2004 [1947]), in which only the purposes of the subject remain within a subjective form of 'reason' prone to conformity, consumption, and authoritarianism. *Dawn of the Dead* (1984) plays this tension out keenly. The fallacies of the 'myth of return' to the 'old lists' are admonished and the survivors begin a new society on distant utopian shores. Yet the 'old ways' remain unchanged—the dominance of the exchange principle and all the hierarchies, inequalities, and social pathologies that come with it—the very conditions that led humanity to the disaster in the first place. The old order lost to the zombie apocalypse is not called into question, instead the narrative assumes the survivors should somehow re-establish the old world anew.

While audiences entertain such survival fantasies in which the individual can make it on their own, this too abstracts away from how social-life is essential to our very being. This is why the putative solutions implicit in many zombie movies have as many dead-ends as the movies themselves. Beginning in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)*,* the group suffers from communicative deficiencies where they splinter and can no longer fight off the horde sufficiently. In *28 Weeks Later* (2007), the solution is to buttress the industrial military complex and the total militarisation of civil life through containment and surveillance—all in the name of British freedom, with the assistance of Uncle Sam. In *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), we see the growing dissolution of all social bonds and the intensification—rather than abandonment—of capitalism on an island of inequality and rapacious consumerism by the survivors who are compelled to scavenge as their new form of labour. In *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), the zombies are enslaved as effable servants and cheap labour for their human masters. It seems the cures for zombification are worse than the disease. Even the hopeful ending of *28 Days Later* (2002) is based on a small group of three, much like *Dawn of Dead* (1978). There is no possibility for social regeneration, just escape as part of the estranged survivors, clinging onto an already doomed civilisation (see Paffenroth 2006).

This shows our true lack of imagination in contemporary cinema where the problem of sociality can no longer be effectively communicated. This problem was anticipated by Horkheimer and Adorno who posited that capitalism was so totalising that it would circumscribe the possibility of almost every cultural expression external to it, including revolution (Gunn and Treat 2005, 144–148).

Consequently, and particularly so in American zombie movies, we find nihilistic despair as the only outcome. As argued by Adorno, 'fettering consciousness' impedes 'the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves' (1991, 106). The zombie is therefore the most extreme embodiment of this alter-archetype, a deliberately one-sided creature—but it is no less a logical outcome of this process because of its exaggeration. We find counterparts in the modern psyche as it faces the contradictory nature of its pathologised social conditions: humans repress and deny, withdraw in numb apathy, or project aggression of the ego. Helplessness, alienation, and a gnawing anxiety are felt not just for the lack of connection with others but a deep-seated fear of the competition that each other represents to the self. We are *not* in this together. All others are *enemy*. I am *alone*. At the social level such processes manifest in racist attacks, aggressive war, mass mania, nihilistic despair, and paranoid protectionism. Such social neurosis is the impulse to fascism and 'Trumpism,' but which only mirrors the presuppositions that the dominant interests had asserted all along: that we live in a world that is utterly hostile, violent, indifferent, alien, and solitary. The ideological interests of the few has become *the* ontological fact that covers all things, the social as well as material universe, under which the ethical mind is completely obliterated.

But being 'duped' is not a foregone conclusion. The most recent turn in zombie films seems to suggest a possibility for social integration. In films like *Shaun of the Dead* and *Warm Bodies*, the zombie becomes the 'post-dead' and re-integrated into society as a 'citizen-other'. However, they then serve a particular subservient role—once again highlighting the pathologies of predatory capitalism—usually as a labourer. So, despite their re-integration, the zombie's existence is defined by neoliberal subjectivity of the *lowest* order (Saunders 2012).[10] For example in *Warm Bodies* (2013), Julie's father refuses to accept that the zombie 'R' can change and subsequently shoots him after he sees the two kiss. Even the name of the leading zombie, 'R', denotes the clear distinction between the re-integrated zombie and the humans who are given complete names. Similarly, when the post-dead return to the village of Roarton in the television series *In the Flesh* (2013–2014), they are faced with prejudice from the other villagers. As such, these most recent depictions are not so much upholding a return to sociality but can be seen as consistent with predatory capitalism. That is, these normalized or re-integrated citizen-zombies reside in contradiction, suffering not only continuous labour exploitation, but also experiencing hostility and segregation from non-infected humans.

It is not then, as Wood once claimed, in reference to Romero's films, that 'the social order … can't be restored' but that it *must* be restored (qtd. in Moreman and Rushton 2011, 4). This is not in the sense of a 'myth of return' to the previous social order under capitalism, but in the sense of a genuinely new, rational order that could satisfy 'the needs and powers' of all humanity (Horkheimer 1972, 246) and thereby arrest zombification. The zombie film alerts us to the need for creating these organic social relations necessary to weaving a lasting social fabric. As Brooks (2006) argues convincingly in *World War Z*, how the survivors behave and socialise is the linchpin of the ethics of the zombie genre: many turn on each other,

becoming worse than the zombie horde; others commit suicide. Yet the 'few good men'—typically always men—are those that care for their survival group and overcome the odds to retain their humanity. In this sense, the genre cuts across political divides by appealing to the organicism of Burke, and to the progressivism of social freedoms and community needs of the Left. Against all common sense, the message the zombie communicates is not about reaching the shores of utopian security, but the social relations necessary for this movement to occur—and what happens when these relations are absent, pathologised, or destroyed.

Conclusion

We no longer need to wait for the next cinematic zombie-event with its garish make-up and extreme gore. All we need to do is look in the mirror of a morning: dead-tired, red-eyed, preparing ourselves for yet another day of tedious monotony, of shuffling around our workplace; vacant, undertaking the same repetitious tasks as before. Or somehow worse, like those made truly aimless in capitalist order who are compelled to join the ever-expanding number of lumpenproletariat, no longer of use to capitalist production. As so fittingly illustrated in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978 and 2004), the only remaining goal of predatory capitalism is consumption, the irrepressible drive to which justifies systemic, hyper-violence that is instrumentalised to ensure the consumption of the few at the expense of all. In this new era of zombie films the spatial boundaries of the outbreak/contagion have been shattered so that zombification is no longer some localised phenomena on the Periphery of civilisation or experienced only by the underclass. The long hands of capitalism have indeed battered down 'all Chinese walls' (Marx and Engels 1976 [1848], 487–488) so that zombification is experienced across all cultures. We are all infected now. Our socio-political life is so utterly pathological that the zombie pandemic is no longer divine retribution like that of early films that emphasised the metaphysical dimensions of the 'undead' but rather the embodiment of our very predation of each other. We are no longer zombie labourers, nor consuming ghouls, but purely parasitic. This shift is not coincidental but marks the transitional phase of capitalism and the specific type of social destruction that accompanies it—the painful ripping away of 'the socius' that we experience as a lived nightmare.

As Robin Wood claimed, it is impossible for cinema to now shout 'Revolution!' All we can hope for are those films that 'imply its necessity' (2003, 342). This is the emancipatory potential of the zombie movie for geopolitics. And whilst this is clouded under the blood spatter of the violent destruction of world order as it tears itself apart, there is a choice to *sociality*, even in the midst of its gruesome decay. We can choose the barbarism of the zombie, or we can—through painstaking processes of moral learning and mutual recognition—create a new world of cosmopolitan community that nurtures, respects, and supports the diversity of all others. Perhaps this remarkable genre is telling us that the slogan should be changed from 'socialism or barbarism' to 'socialism or zombification'.

Notes

1 See 'No zombie sightings despite warning on 520' at http://mynorthwest.com/11/698090/ No-zombie-sightings-despite-warning-on-520# [last accessed 25 June 2012].
2 The Golden Era refers to the series of blockbuster zombie films produced under Romero between 1968–1983.
3 While we have attempted to limit our scope in this chapter to predominantly film (and television), we do make reference to exemplary novels that were each made the subject of film where appropriate.
4 Lauro and Embry make a similar observation but see this relation as held in tension, whereas we push to a resolution (see Lauro and Embry 2008).
5 While popular geopolitics has carved a space for the Frankfurt School and its theory of the Culture Industry (see Dodds 1996; McFarlane and Hay 2003), our contribution seeks to overcome those recent criticisms that have rejected the theory of the culture industry for rendering audiences as passive consumers (see Dodds 2006; Dittmer 2010, 46–56).
6 A particular correlation can be seen in alien horror films of this time, esp. *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959) which was one of the first to combine zombies and aliens. It should also be noted that the Nazi-zombie has not been lost, but continued in *Shock Waves* (1977) through to *Dead Snow* (2009).
7 Some doubt the authenticity of zombies in films that have zombies arising from viral infection rather than reanimation; nevertheless, these now seem to outweigh the latter.
8 While many dispute this classification, we classify *I am Legend* as part of the zombie genre due to the behavioural and physiological adaptations.
9 This is most acutely captured in the repeated symbolism of the butterfly throughout the film, in both original and alternate endings, that make the connection to sociality explicit.
10 We thank the editors of this book, Robert Saunders and Vlad Strukov, for bringing this recent turn to our attention. We return to this later.

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