

The Walking Dead

Representations of Death, the Other and the West

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The Walking Dead: *Representations of Death, the Other and the West*

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Note on the Text and Abbreviations

Robert Kirkman is the writer and creator of *The Walking Dead* comics, and Rathburn, Adlard and Moore have respectively contributed with ink, pencil and gray tones. It has issued from 2003 and is still published today. The comics will be referenced as (Kirkman).

Frank Darabont developed Kirkman's comics into television format for AMC and ran the first season (aired in 2010). The second (2011-2012) and third seasons (2012-2013) were led by Glen Mazzara. The fourth season (2013-2014) was run by Scott M. Gimple. The show will be referenced through the abbreviations given below.

WD101: *The Walking Dead* Season 1, Episode 1: "Days Gone By" (Premiere)

WD102: *The Walking Dead* Season 1, Episode 2: "Guts"

WD106: *The Walking Dead* Season 1, Episode 6: "TS-19" (Finale)

WD201: *The Walking Dead* Season 2, Episode 1: "What Lies Ahead" (Premiere)

WD206: *The Walking Dead* Season 2, Episode 6: "Secrets"

WD207: *The Walking Dead* Season 2, Episode 7: "Pretty Much Dead Already" (Mid-Finale)

WD208: *The Walking Dead* Season 2, Episode 8: "Nebraska" (Mid-Premiere)

WD213: *The Walking Dead* Season 2, Episode 13: "Beside the Dying Fire" (Season Finale)

WD301: *The Walking Dead* Season 3 Episode 1: "Seed" (Season Premiere)

WD308: *The Walking Dead* Season 3 Episode 8: "Made to Suffer" (Mid-Finale)

WD309: *The Walking Dead* Season 3 Episode 9: "The Suicide King" (Mid-Premiere)

WD316: *The Walking Dead* Season 3 Episode 16: "Welcome to the Tombs" (Finale)

WD401: *The Walking Dead* Season 4 Episode 1: "30 Days without an Accident" (Premiere)

WD408: *The Walking Dead* Season 4 Episode 8: "Too Far Gone" (Mid-Finale)

WD409: *The Walking Dead* Season 4 Episode 9: "After" (Mid-Premiere)

WD414: *The Walking Dead* Season 4 Episode 14: "The Grove"

WD416: *The Walking Dead* Season 4 Episode 16: "A" (Finale)

To denote scenes and sequences in each episode, the thesis uses *minutes:seconds* as a system where e.g. 3:14 means 3 minutes and 14 seconds into the episode in question.

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1 Introduction

AMC's *The Walking Dead* was listed as the second most popular TV-show in 2014 on IMDb (IMBd-Editors), an Internet forum with 200 million regular voters. 17,3 million Americans sat in front of their TVs for the season 5 premiere of the television series (Kissel), but the actual number of viewers is difficult to pinpoint as neither illegal downloads nor non-American viewers are accounted for. The only certain thing is that the audience exceeded 17,3 million people. Around the world, people are imagining what a zombie apocalypse might be like, and one of the major contributors to this craze is Robert Kirkman, the main brain behind *The Walking Dead*, as both creator and writer of the comic books as well as writer and executive producer of the television show. Though the zombie has grown to become an increasingly important trope over several decades, I would argue that our post-millennial culture is particularly receptive to this monster: zombies are abundant on screen, on page and online. This thesis will not attempt to explain why the zombie has become one of the most frequently seen monsters in today's popular culture. Instead, this thesis claims that *The Walking Dead* can be read as a critique of certain aspects of contemporary Western society. The story is set in the U.S., an imaginary postapocalyptic America, which may be taken to represent Western society at large.

Since the turn of the millennium, the zombie has made its presence known in many fields in Western popular culture. Many authors are now, just as Robert Kirkman, spreading the zombie across Western hemisphere: the Swede John Ajvide Lindqvist, the American Max Brooks, the Australian Brett McBean and the Spanish writer Manuel Loureiro. Additionally, several major news media have also devoted space to the zombie craze, including the Wall Street Journal (Drezner) and BBC (Barber). Kyle W. Bishop presents the history and major works within zombie horror, and argues that the zombie's popularity has peaked simultaneously with important historical events such as the Cold War, the Vietnam War and the Gulf War (*American Zombie Gothic* 15). The zombie, as it is known today, came with George Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968, and when a Western country has faced an anxiety-inducing event, the zombie has resurrected as a trope in cinemas and other media (Bishop *American Zombie Gothic* 14). In other words, the zombie's popularity has fluctuated until the 21st century, but now we see that it is becoming increasingly popular, with *The Walking Dead* being a front-runner.

As a result of its popularity, *The Walking Dead*, and its zombies, has become a commodity; a global phenomenon that seemingly never stops selling. You can now buy *The Walking Dead* artifacts such as crossbows, guns and swords, but also t-shirts, mugs, dolls and socks.¹ The latest product is an app that turns your selfie into a zombie-selfie. Kirkman, as he revealed on Conan, has even been asked to support a *Walking Dead* perfume, but there he drew the line (O'Brian). This did not, however, stop others from making one, and "Eau de Death" is now available to those who might need it (Eng). Furthermore, *The Walking Dead* goes far in terms of adaptation and transmediality: This fictional universe is now expressed through the comics, the television show, video games, graphic novels and novels written by others, and additionally, AMC recently revealed that they are producing a companion series to the original, titled *Fear of the Walking Dead* (Terrones). As a consequence, it is suitable to appropriate the term "high concept" to *The Walking Dead*, which denotes a production with "a wide range of outlets and ancillary products" (Berry 212). The irony of *The Walking Dead* becoming an industry of merchandise must also be acknowledged, given that, as we shall see, the show can be read as a critique of consumerism. The fact that people are willing spend money on smelling like zombies and buying zombie socks simply because they appreciate a novel, comic, TV-show or video game seems indicative of our consumerist society.

The postapocalyptic universe that Kirkman guides us through, in both his comic books and TV-series, is best categorized as horror fiction, and Kirkman even labels his comics as "HORROR". This thesis aims to investigate whether the TV-series can be understood to represent anxieties in our contemporary society, in line with Levina and Bui's argument that current monsters offer a space where "society safely can represent and address anxieties of its time" (1). To what extent may this also be true of the zombies in *The Walking Dead*? What kinds of fears are brought into play, and how might this popular TV-show be said to enact anxieties in Western society at large? To answer these research questions, the present thesis draws on Christine Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*. The modern man's crisis, as Brooke-Rose explains it, has in many ways inspired the subchapters in this study. She argues that man is experiencing a crisis due to his discovery of man's mortality, his own decentralization, and the untenability of progress (7). *The Walking Dead* can arguably also be said to deal with the anxieties that Brooke-Rose addresses, and man's discovery of his mortality is definitely present and will be addressed in 3.1. Man's fear of decentralization is discussed in relation with the ascending Other in 3.2, and finally man's

¹ <http://shopthewalkingdead.com/features/29333827>

fear of the untenability of progress will be noted in 3.3 as fearing ourselves. The thesis argues that *The Walking Dead* can be viewed as addressing fears of death, reproductivity, terrorism, injustice and unsustainability. Therefore, it has what I would describe as allegorical potential, allegory being defined as a work having a “second distinct meaning partially hidden behind its literal or visible meaning” (Baldick). This postapocalyptic show may turn out to be about fears that do not involve zombies at all, such as the fear of the Other in Western societies.

Even though scholars are paying attention to the escalating popularity of the zombie phenomenon, there are relatively few discussing AMC’s *The Walking Dead*. Several of the comments used in this analysis are angled towards Kirkman’s comic books. Furthermore, there are fewer studies that exceed a brief comment of one to three pages. Therefore, this thesis stands out as one of few in-depth analyses covering *The Walking Dead* as a television series. There is one study discussing both the show and the comics, James Lowder’s *Triumph of the Walking Dead*, but this book borders on fandom. There is one edited volume published by an academic press, *The Walking Dead and Philosophy* edited by Wayne Yuen with the edited volume. This book is a part of Reich’s Popular Culture and Philosophy series and uses *The Walking Dead* to discuss philosophy. In one of the chapters, Franklin Allaire questions the moral dignity of zombies or “walkers” and the ethics around killing them. He concludes that walkers have no morality, as they are neither human nor animals (205, see also Hinzmann and Arp). This thesis looks at how some scenes address this question in 3.1.2, and while Allaire, a PhD student at the University of Hawaii, is correct that the show generally promotes simply kill zombies, we shall see that the show occasionally promotes to let the dead live. Other chapters the *Walking Dead and Philosophy* discuss the show and comics in light of famous philosophers such as René Descartes and David Chalmers.

Other previous criticism concerning *The Walking Dead* is Hassler-Forest’s chapter in *Serialization in Popular Culture*. He discusses how *The Walking Dead* has contributed to change how its audience watches TV and even the definition of its medium. He points to *The Walking Dead* being transmedia: one story existing in different versions in different media. Each separate version has advertised and increased the audience for the other versions. Sharrett, another scholar, also discusses *The Walking Dead*. This chapter appears in *A Companion to the Modern Horror Film*, where he argues that today’s zombie fiction, including *The Walking Dead*, has lost its allegorical potential and almost never serves as a “social/political commentary” (63). This thesis, however, argues oppositely, and will address Sharrett’s claims in connection with the Other in 3.1.2 and 3.2.1.

In Murali Balaji's *Thinking Dead: What the Zombie Apocalypse Means*, there are three chapters concerning this TV-series, written by, respectively, Baldwin and McCarthy, Kozma, and Balaji. Baldwin and McCarthy argue convincingly that the television series presents anti-feminist and post-racial stereotypes, where women and people of color are valued only in so much as they are useful (76). The thesis does not pursue this line of reasoning to the same extent as Baldwin and McCarthy, although it does problematize the role of women and argue that the show confronts the concept of the Other. Kozma's chapter in the same volume concentrates on how *The Walking Dead* renounces technology to recreate its world, thereby also proposing that the understanding of both technology and humanity is incomplete and imperfect (156). Balaji, in his chapter, discusses how the AMC has formed a commodity by synergizing itself with the comic book series (238).

As regards the existing criticism on Kirkman's comic books, Victoria Nelson in her book *Gothicka* handles apocalyptic zombie fiction in general. She emphasizes that, similarly to George Romero's films, Kirkman's zombies can be seen as alter-egos of the protagonists, thus making it difficult to distinguish humans from monsters (156). As section 3.2.3 claims, this is also true for the character Michonne (who is not mentioned by Nelson), especially when she meets her zombie doppelganger in WD409. Furthermore, Kyle W. Bishop devotes an entire chapter to Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* in a contribution to *Monster Culture in the 21st Century*. He argues here, as Nelson does, that the zombie in the comic books is not the only monster; the protagonists are also "truly monstrous" (74). This shift in focus can also serve to allegorize zombie fiction not as a traditional representation of "cultural fears and anxieties associated with the threat of terrorism", but rather as expressing anxieties for what Western culture can do to potential terrorists (Bishop 77). Gerry Canavan takes a different approach to Kirkman's comic books, and reads the zombie from a post-colonial point of view, as they are the object of the readers' and the characters' gazes. However, he also concludes with an example of the character Carol in the comics (who is very different from the character in the TV-show), where she lets herself be devoured by the zombie Others. The comics' version of Carol steps beyond the binary opposition of "us" and "them", which is very latent in both tales, and embraces alterity (Canavan 450). This example demonstrates a difference between the two versions. However, apart from the case of Carol, the TV narrative generally develops similarly to that of the comic books. While this thesis will discuss the concept of the Other in similar terms, it studies the TV-series and not the comic books, referring to other examples.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze and interpret *The Walking Dead* as a TV series, and in order to do so a theoretical basis was needed. The first chapter of the thesis is an introductory theorizing chapter opening with Dudley Andrew's adaptation theory to discuss the relationship between Kirkman's comic books versus the television series. The aim is to find out to what extent the commentary by previous critics on the comics can be said to apply to the television series. Following this brief adaptation analysis, the theory chapter seeks to define the genre of *The Walking Dead* by considering both major scholars such as Tzvetan Todorov and more recent scholarship on horror fiction and other relevant genres including the uncanny, science fiction and dystopia.

Aspiring to take the television medium seriously, the thesis presents the theoretical and methodological framework by Bateman and Schmidt in *How Films Mean*. Additionally to these recent film scholars, the thesis builds on classical works like John Fiske's "Television Culture". The final part of the introductory theory chapter will outline the most relevant terminology for the thesis, including dystopia and postapocalypse, as well as the method and terms used to interpret individual scenes and episodes. The manner in which I approach the text is by firstly looking at various technical aspects of the TV narration, then letting these given features guide my interpretation, a method inspired by Bateman and Schmidt.

After the theorizing in the first chapter, the thesis turns to view the series analytically, and argues that the show treats death as an object of fear and fascination. Furthermore, the thesis examines the way *The Walking Dead* leaves its characters, and the viewers relating to them, with a brutal understanding of life and death. The second subchapter looks at the construction of the Other and reveals how zombies, as well as other antagonists, drive the plot forwards as well as address latent fears in Western society. Finally, the thesis investigates the allegorical potential in a reversed manner, by viewing the monster as a representation of the viewers' selves. By building on inherent tropes and images of the horror genre, zombies might reflect aspects of the contemporary "brainless" consumer.

2 Theory and Method

2.1 Comics versus Television

The basic plot components are the same in both the comic books and the television series; yet as the stories develop, it is evident that they also diverge. Robert Kirkman, who is the creator of the comic books together with Adlard, Moore and Rathburn, is also one of the executive producers of the television series involved in writing scripts for the episodes. How he feels about the relationship between his texts becomes clear in an interview, where he states that the television series is completely “divorced” from the original comic books (Peisner). However, the characters have the same names, they are situated in the same places and the most cataclysmic events still occur in both texts. The texts even share the same title. Consequently, a mapping of the relation between the comic books and the TV-show is called for to understand the realization of both narratives.

Dudley Andrew presents three modes of adaptation, or the art of converting a text from page onto screen, and they are explained as follows: the first is borrowing, where key concepts or ideas are the only thing borrowed from the original work (374). Secondly, Andrew speaks of intersecting, meaning to use certain elements from the original, so that the plots intersect each other at certain places, and the third way is fidelity or transformation, where the original text is transformed to suit the new medium (374, 375). According to Kirkman’s statement above and these short explanations, the formerly mentioned “divorce” between the series and the comic books can imply that the mode of adaptation is borrowing. On the other hand, when the characters, main events and the scenario remain the same, this understanding might be proven false. When compared to, for example, Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* and the inspirational source of it, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (Lothe 157-196), the versions of *The Walking Dead* on page and screen seem strikingly similar. Not only are the characters the same, but they are also in the same places, for example in Atlanta, Hershel’s farm, Woodbury and the prison, and they are additionally faced with the same antagonists, such as Randall’s group, the Governor, zombies and the prisoners. In other words, the “divorce” might not be as complete as Kirkman states.

At this point, there is a need for a brief summary of the plot, in order to know what Andrew’s modes are used to explain. Rick, the main character, wakes up from a coma in the first episode and issue. He wakes up to discover that the dead have arisen and the living have

fled. The stories begin with his search for his family, and Rick finds Lori and Carl, and meets the people they have camped with. Rick's best friend Shane is the leader of this group, but eventually they take Rick as their leader. This group encounters numerous struggles along the way and none of the safe havens prove to be what they hoped for. Conflicts develop between the characters within the group and between this and other surviving groups, while at the same time the zombie poses as a continuous threat to everyone. They move from one place to another, lose people they love, fight zombies and other humans, and never seem to run out of gas or food. Yet, both the comics and the show dwell on the monstrosity of humans, through both antagonists and protagonists who clearly lose their grip on their humane nature. This is the basic plot structure, and one can only suspect that this is how the story will continue to develop in the future, as neither the show nor the comic books have yet reached a conclusion.

As all of the above involve both the show and the comics, the mode of adaptation can be seen as Andrew's intersecting mode. The plots coincide at certain points and otherwise go on independently. If it indeed were Andrew's third mode, fidelity, the dialogue, plot and all the rest should stay as close to the source material as television as a medium could grant. This is clearly not the case, since the show, despite being based on the comic books, deviates quite distinctly from its source at certain points. One example that demonstrates this clearly concerns the character Shane. He is Rick's best friend and colleague, and he stepped up and took care of his wife and child during the apocalypse while Rick was in a coma. In both versions, Shane and Lori, Rick's wife, start a romance that ends quickly when Rick turns out to be alive. This causes much drama, resulting with Shane's death in both versions. The interesting thing is that the death occurs at different points in the narratives. In the comic books, Carl shoots Shane after he threatens to kill Rick while they are still outside Atlanta (Kirkman). In the television show, Rick stabs Shane while they are at Hershel's farm, while Carl shoots the reanimated zombie-Shane (WD212). This example demonstrates that even though elements of the narratives correspond, such as the conflict between Rick and Shane, Rick getting the upper hand over Shane, and Carl being involved with the killing, the television series conveys these events in their own, independent way. When so many ideas are included in both versions, it is evident that the borrowing mode is not the right one, but neither is the fidelity mode. This leaves the intersecting mode and makes Kirkman's "divorce" between the stories incomplete, since the stories keep referencing each other as time passes. However, we must also bear in mind that Kirkman as the co-creator of both

versions, makes money on both narratives, and it would be naïve to believe that he, as well as the rest of the creators, does not wish to increase sales of both tales.

There are other ways of understanding adaptation apart from Andrew's modes, as Robert Stam argues in "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation". He rejects "fidelity" as a concept in adaptations, as true fidelity to all aspects is an impossibility. Moreover, one might ask what the directors should be faithful to: the biographical author, the implied author, the implied reader or an actual reader? As the reception and understanding of a novel, or comics, vary from reader to reader, how could fidelity ever be aspired for when every reader relates differently to texts? Stam instead refers to Gerard Genette's understanding of intertextuality, and uses this to discuss how a film based on a novel forms a dialogue with its source of origin (65). Stam argues in favor of understanding adaptation as a series of operations: "selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization, and reculturalization" of the source text resulting in a new, transformed text (68). This view leads to an understanding of *The Walking Dead* TV-series and comic books as two texts with many intertextual references, where the plots coincide and freely take inspiration from each other. This gives some credibility to Kirkman's opinion of the works as being "divorced" or different, while still enabling the intersecting characters, settings and events.

The two media have some things in common, despite their major differences. Both the comics and television series depend on images and dialogue, which are the main apparatuses the creators have to work with. However, the media shape the stories differently, which will lead to dissimilar reading experiences. While both media depend on images, comic books present them side-by-side whereas a TV gives you one on top of the other. Scott McCloud argues that "**SPACE DOES FOR COMICS WHAT TIME DOES FOR FILM!**[sic.]" (7), meaning that the temporal structure available to film and television also is available to comics, yet it is expressed through the ordering of images on the page instead of sequencing images temporarily. This difference affects the audiences tremendously, as the reader of the comic books can look at each image for as long as they prefer, but the TV typically shows 24 frames per second (Scalzi). Another obvious difference between them concerns the dialogue, which is spoken and received aurally by viewers, but written and received visually by readers. Additionally, the television enables more methods of shaping its narratives, where the illusion of the moving image, writing, music and sound effects are examples. On the other hand, both the comic books and the show depend on angles and perspective, and although a

printed page shows fewer pictures than a screen, the use of perspective is valid for both. But it must be acknowledged that a story presented on TV is further constructed than comics and that a reader has more autonomy as to how to receive the text than someone watching film or TV.

2.2 Genre

How are we to describe the genre of *The Walking Dead*? One way of doing so can be to turn towards one of the prime scholars in the field, Tzvetan Todorov, and see how the genres originally were dealt with. He was one of the writers that originally contributed to the academic appraisal of fantastical literature, and his views will be the fundament for exploring the genres appropriable for *The Walking Dead*. Ken Gelder, the editor of *The Horror Reader*, acknowledges the importance of Todorov's essay: "it shifted away from conventional views of fantasy as an 'escape' from, or an 'alternative' to or idealization of, the world, because it showed the world and the otherworldly – the real and the imagination – to be inextricably entwined" (11-12). In *The Fantastic*, Todorov elaborates on supernatural genres by presenting three categories: the marvelous, the fantastic and the uncanny. These genres will be discussed here to illuminate the vast and blurry field of genres and subgenres that exists and the difficulties one might meet when trying to define the unreal.

Let us begin with how Todorov describes the marvelous: a narrative that accepts the supernatural in the end and provokes no particular reaction in the characters or the implicit reader (Todorov 52, 54). If one were to place *The Walking Dead* within this genre, we should turn to Todorov's fourth subgenre: instrumental marvelous, which resembles science fiction. Here, the story will acknowledge the supernatural by presenting rational explanations that do not obey the laws of reality outside the fictional universe (56). Concerning *The Walking Dead*, the existence of zombies should have a logical explanation that both the characters and the implicit reader will accept as a supernatural part of the story. This is not the case in either story so far, and as both remain unfinished it is difficult to tell whether one will ever know. Such explanations are wanted by the characters and hinted at in the plot, in particular through the characters Dr. Jenner (WD106) and Eugene (WD411), but a coherent explanation is yet to be given. However, raising these questions in the plot could imply that the creators want the reader and viewer to pay attention to the extraordinariness of the zombie epidemic.

The Walking Dead shares other features of science fiction, and one of these is its timelessness. The characters are placed in a scenario so different from our contemporary reality that one possible explanation is that it must be set in our future. Science fiction as a genre is mostly about fictional futures, and if we accept *The Walking Dead* to be a fiction of a possible future, it is a very grim one. This understanding leads us further towards dystopian literature, which can be defined as images of the future that point “at the way the world is supposedly going in order to provide urgent propaganda for a change in direction” (Stableford). In other words, dystopias show a grim future to point out problems in the contemporary. If we return to Todorov, however, he points out that the marvelous does not have allegorical potential: “If what we read describes a supernatural event, yet we take the words not in their literal meaning but in another sense which refers to nothing supernatural, there is no longer any space in which the fantastic can exist” (63-64). As the marvelous was the genre in which we found science fiction and dystopia, who both have allegorical potential according to the definition above, a contradiction is placed before us. Todorov states that science fiction is a part of the marvelous, but how can it be when dystopian fiction, which is a part of science fiction, comments on something beyond itself? According to Stableford’s definition, dystopias seek to be social-political commentaries of their contemporary. In other words, Todorov’s boundaries for the marvelous do not have room for the subgenres he includes. The supernatural in dystopias takes part of an extended social commentary that this kind of fiction perpetuates, and therefore the supernatural cannot be wholly accepted.

If Todorov were to read texts as allegories, the fiction needed to present “explicit indications” towards a double meaning in the text; otherwise all literature could be allegorical (63). He further concludes that allegories bring the fantastic into question, and as such may lose the supernatural altogether. If this happens, the genre would no longer be marvelous or fantastic, but uncanny or something beside these categories. But how can science fiction be a part of marvelous literature, when all futuristic literature per definition changes at least one aspect, and often more, of contemporary society? Will not this alteration inevitably form a comment on contemporary society? Regarding *The Walking Dead* such changes are the introduction of a new species and the changes this leads to, such as the breakdown of technology, government, infrastructure, or one could say the breakdown of everything that constitutes a modern way of life. *The Walking Dead*, as a fiction of the future, proposes changes through presenting a society without all the systems, structures and laws the post-

millennium is founded upon. By presenting these changes, the story immediately becomes juxtaposed with reality, and cannot escape being a comment upon it.

Let us move on to another genre, the uncanny, as Todorov explains it. This genre realizes only the descriptions of fear and other reactions, in other words, only one of the conditions of the fantastic (47). This genre is lacking the fantastic as the supernatural events are given a rational explanation at the end of the story, and he gives gothic writers such as Radcliffe and Reeve as examples (41). However, due to the incompleteness of the series it becomes problematic to discuss this aspect. But the series does have a possibility of suiting this genre requirement, as the first issue and the first episode both deal with the protagonist waking up from a coma. Todorov's exposition lists rational explanations within uncanny literature such as dreams, madness and influence of drugs (45). If the series should end with Rick waking up of his coma to find normality restored, the series would be accepted as uncanny by Todorov as a narrative about a very long dream. On the other hand, if such an explanation does not occur, the series cannot be uncanny. This could pose a problem to the understanding of an unfinished work such as *The Walking Dead*, but what Todorov points to as a criteria, the description of fear and other reactions, is clearly present on the pages and screens of *The Walking Dead*.

Nicholas Royle discusses the uncanny at some length, and sees Todorov as inconsistent in his explanation of the uncanny (18): At one point Todorov restricts the fiction with uncanny capabilities to those mentioned above, but he also says that the genre assimilates into the rest of literature on one side and faces the fantastic on the other. In other words, everything non-fantastic could be understood as uncanny. If one were to follow Royle instead, the uncanny does not work as a genre anymore. Royle argues that the uncanny is an experience acquired through literature or observing the outside world; the uncanny depicts the uncertainty that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity ("The Uncanny" 36). It concerns how one senses something and the resulting feelings (ibid.). Precisely in the manner that viewers and readers might sense the zombie both familiar and unfamiliar: unfamiliarly dead in a familiar human form. Heeding Royle's thirteen forms of the uncanny, *The Walking Dead* meets the requirements for several of them and particularly through animism, which concerns situations where something lifeless is granted life or spirit ("The Uncanny" 37). While it would be difficult to argue that the walkers have gained spirit in their afterlives, it is undeniable that the zombies in *The Walking Dead* have been granted some sort of life. The upshot of all this is that the uncanny can be fruitful to discuss in

relation to Kirkman's works, but it does not help to situate the show within a genre, due to how it has developed since Todorov.

Todorov's last category is the fantastic, the genre that names this scholarly cornerstone. Consequently, this genre is delved into and explained thoroughly by its difference from other categories, those above being examples of the contrastive measures taken. The fantastic is where the reader hesitates between the marvelous and the uncanny, the fictional story might be supernatural and accepted as marvelous or it might be representational and accepted as uncanny (25). If the reader hesitates between the two, as might be the case with *The Walking Dead*, it can be fantastic. As Ken Gelder, the editor of *The Horror Reader*, argues concerning the reader's hesitation: "The fantastic ... refuses to resolve itself, maintaining the kind of ambiguity of effect more commonly associated with literature itself" (12). When this understanding is connected to the show, some "hesitations" arise, and Rick's coma and his hallucinations (the apparitions of Lori) in season 3 stand out as examples. Whether this is sufficient for the viewer to see the show as "refusing to resolve itself" is up to each individual, but there might be too few, however unresolved, points in the narrative that would cause the viewer to remember the possibility of hesitation that *The Walking Dead* enables. Thus, it seems unlikely that the series would comply with any of Todorov's strict categories.

There have been numerous critiques of Todorov's *The Fantastic*, but despite all the problems faced here and elsewhere, this analysis has shown how Todorov's essay still remains valuable for today's texts. The fantasy scholar Martin Baker is one who chastises Todorov for "assuming maleness" in his audience, while also presenting them as "curiously individualistic" in receiving the text (290-291). Despite the obvious problems that Baker and the discussion above has shown, this analysis has also highlighted that some of these problematic aspects have kept recurring for 40 years. Whether *The Walking Dead* has allegorical potential or not is questionable, and whether or not to read literature as fantastical or allegorical was one of Todorov's main concerns. Regardless of the unsuitability of his genres, this account has enabled a thorough mapping of the genres most relevant to the show, created links between recent and original theories and illuminated that concepts and ideas introduced in a different literary era still are worth discussing. At this point, the thesis will turn to more recent genres, where Claire P. Curtis' definition of postapocalyptic fiction will form a central part.

2.3 Postapocalyptic Television

As the previous section illustrates, many genres can be used to describe the text in question. One might go even further and argue that *The Walking Dead* television series can be characterized as horror, fantasy, uncanny, science fiction, gothic, dystopian, postapocalyptic and monster fiction. Claire P. Curtis acknowledges these multiple genres by positioning postapocalyptic fiction “at a genre crossroads between science fiction, horror and utopia/dystopia” (7). While elements of all the mentioned genres may be present in the show, none of genres can adequately describe the text without mentioning the postapocalyptic, and thus the postapocalyptic could be a defining trait. *The Walking Dead* does not depict the apocalypse itself; the viewers are presented with a fictional story that begins after the zombies have taken over. Even though several flashbacks throughout the series depict the apocalypse and its chaos, the main plot takes place after the zombie invasion: after Rick has woken up from his coma. According to Curtis, postapocalyptic fiction has a focus on “the starting over”, rather than the breakdown (5). This separates the show from being apocalyptic fiction, where the apocalypse is the center of the story (Curtis 6). But she also contends that this type of fiction centers on “our deepest fears” (Curtis 5), which is also something that this thesis proclaims. As I would like to argue, this also justifies the DVD’s label as “horror/drama”: the postapocalypse allows the narrative to problematize “starting over” on both a personal and societal level, which gives the show a double role as an entertaining drama as well as a social-political commentary.

Robin Wood is central to critics of horror films with his chapter “American Nightmare” where he speaks of American horror in the 60s and 70s. His definition suits the claims of this thesis perfectly: to address fears in society is often seen as a trait of the horror genre, and it is often done by portraying a monster as a threat to “normality” (Wood 78). This suits *The Walking Dead* since the zombies have not only threatened, but also destroyed, many aspects of what constitutes a “normal” society. That the monster threatens and destroys in horror films is a way for society to deal with the dual concept of the repressed Other (Wood 75). Levina and Bui trail this thought further in *Monster Theory in the 21st Century*, and claim that in the twenty-first century this representational approach to monsters, as laid down by Robin Wood in the 70s, has started to orientate towards a new broader monstrosity; one that does not represent one thing, but is “a fluid category concerned with representation and

ambiguity of change” (5). As this thesis will demonstrate, *The Walking Dead* can be seen as a representation of several fears in society, that often are ambiguous and fluid.

Dystopian fiction is commonly seen as a subgenre of science fiction (Stableford). It is defined as fiction that denotes a society where the utopia has “gone sour” (Milner, Ryan, Savage 8). Dystopian fiction, as well as utopian fiction, is also known for its allegorical potential that can serve as a critique of its contemporary (ibid.). *The Walking Dead* can be classified as dystopian, due to the grim universe it depicts. The society we encounter in the series stands out as dystopian, and the viewers are often reminded of the pre-apocalyptic utopia through flashbacks. Dystopian works are now acknowledged for its mass-popularity, which creates an opportunity to convey dystopian images to a wider audience than earlier. According to Booker, this could also pose “serious problems” as it might “strip those images of their critical force” (335). *The Walking Dead* might even cause further deterioration to dystopian images due to its medium: “Television, it would seem, weakens the imaginative distance that has to be culturally and morally maintained between ‘true’ and ‘entertainment’ horror, between fact and fiction”, due to the news and how television is traditionally used (Hills 129). However, as I would like to argue, *The Walking Dead* has moved beyond this obstacle. Neither the medium nor the large audience restrains the true horror of our dystopian universe: on the contrary, this has made dystopian television even more grotesque in its horror. The frames depict very grotesque and disgusting monsters that appear to be very different from the “real” horrors depicted on the news channel.

Method

At this point, this thesis’ interpretative tools will be presented, and these tools stem from both recent and classic scholars. In a pivotal study, John Fiske shows how television uses cultural codes to communicate with the audience. He argues that the viewer often identifies with a position of “a white, male, middle-class American (or Westerner) of conventional morality” (1280-1281), and this is true for our viewers: the main character Rick is a white, male, middle-class American who starts out with a policeman’s morals. Fiske also cites a study done by Gerbner, who has worked out a killed-killer ratio where the white male in the prime of his life was very likely to survive everything (1279). This is also the case with the protagonist Rick, who survives everything in *The Walking Dead*. Thus, the show definitively promotes an ideology where the white, middle-class male is dominant. Furthermore, Fiske has discovered that villains often are accompanied with music in minor keys while heroes are

surrounded by music in major keys. Such details are, according to Fiske, important: they dictate how the viewers relate to characters. The setting and costume are also tools the television uses to communicate with the audience: the setting, clothes and accessories are powerful codes for a television with its detailed frames. It takes few frames to enhance a gun, sword or crossbow on screen, which will convey the strength and dominance of a character. On the other hand, it takes little time to frame jewels, lips and a cleavage, that would establish a female character as alluring. These are what Fiske calls social codes, and they are used relentlessly by television to characterize and convey ideologies.

Barry Salt is a more recent film scholar worth mentioning in our context. In his in-depth study of American cinema, he argues that its stylistic norm has changed. In order to investigate this, he measures the average shot length, reverse angle cuts, point of view shots, insert shots, the combination of shots and the camera movements in 20 randomly selected Hollywood films. Even though this thesis does not attempt anything similar, Salt's terminology and findings will be of use. Salt differentiates the closeness to the character on screen with these terms: big close up, close up, medium close up, medium shot, medium long shot, long shot and very long shot (125). These terms are fairly self-explanatory, and will be used to describe the frames in the analysis of *The Walking Dead* below. The camera movement is described by the following terms: pan, tilt, track, crane and zoom, and sometimes these are combined in one shot (126). Concerning the relation between the shots in a scene, Salt uses "reverse angle" to describe the shot depicting the opposite to the former shot, and if the succeeding or preceding shot gives exactly what the character looks at it is called a "point of view shot". Additionally, he uses "insert shot" to describe shots of objects, distant scenes and shots presumably taken with stand-ins for the actors. While Salt uses these terms to categorize, this thesis will use them to describe the shots and scenes in question.

Salt's study led to the discovery that American cinema is currently using extremely fast cutting and continuous close shooting (147). After he establishes this as the norm, he comments upon the films that deviate from these norms and tries to describe why they are deviating. He points to movies such as *Deep Blue Sea* and *Dark City*, two science fiction films, and argues that they have a more even spread of shots, with a higher occurrence of both big close ups and long shots. Additionally, he draws out *The Blair Witch Project* as having a high occurrence of tracking. These techniques are widely used in *The Walking Dead* as well, which could be explained by the show's connection with science fiction and the plot, which tracks a group of people starting over at various places. Furthermore, as the characters

continuously are under a threat from zombies, many of the scenes in the series, like those in the thriller *The Blair Witch Project*, involve tracking shots.

John Bateman and Karl-Heinrich Schmidt's *Multimodal Film Analysis: How Films Mean* will also take part in the interpretation of *The Walking Dead*. They argue that films, and therefore also television, should be closer analyzed as it stands: "to make explicit what is ... 'in' the filmic material under investigation" before one starts interpreting (3). They continue that this approach to filmic texts has not been sufficiently pursued in academia and that film criticism is suffering from it (*ibid.*). This thesis will attempt to fill the gaps that Bateman and Schmidt reveal by describing the filmic features before interpreting them. Thus, at least once per subchapter, a scene will be described on its technical features, and these observations will enable the interpretation to be as close to the text as possible. In the remaining scenes, the given features have also been the foundation of the interpretation, creating links between film comprehension and film interpretation (see also Bordwell). According to Bateman and Schmidt, this distinction is also important for Todorov who distinguishes between a text's "signified facts" and "symbolized facts" (2). This thesis will firstly present how the camera and other constituents create meaning in the scenes and sequences discussed, and let this precede and lead the interpretation of *The Walking Dead* and its allegorical potential.

As this chapter has tried to demonstrate, the genres and subgenres applicable to the show are many, and they all add meaning to *The Walking Dead* by emphasizing different aspects present in the show. There is also much to be said about the medium and this form of narrative that adds meaning to the series. However, it is important to bear in mind what Claire P. Curtis highlighted about postapocalyptic fiction: "[it] speaks both to our deepest fears and our desire to start over again" (5). Despite all the theories and camera functions, this narrative act may be an essential cause of *The Walking Dead*'s tremendous popularity; Rick and the other characters have to start over again and again, both in the comics and in the TV-series, when every safe abode is made unsafe by a destructive force. Therefore, my analysis will primarily look at the episodes and scenes in the "cliffhanger" episodes, or, to put it in other words, the climaxes in the series. The nature of the series is to make its viewers addicted to the plot; the audience is left to wait while the protagonists metaphorically hang on cliffs until the next episode. The climaxes of the show are naturally largest at each season's mid-finale and finale, and these episodes, along with the resolutions in the seasons' mid-premieres and premieres, are scrutinized closest.

3 Death, the Other and the West

3.1 Death, Life and Zombies

Death is death.

Rick, WD208 (31:31)

The Walking Dead evolves around the paradox of life and death, particularly through the impossibility of the zombie or “walker”. The dead have started to live, or at least to eat and walk, and the story about this phenomenon makes millions of people around the world sit down in front of their televisions. This might not be such a revolutionary thing, however, as death has been a prospect of fear and fascination throughout history. Death has been personified in pictures at least since *La Danse Macabre* or the dance of death in the 1400s: “The earliest well-known dance of death, the *Danse macabre* [was] painted at the cemetery of the Holy innocents in Paris [in] 1424” (Appleford 87, see also Morton). In our context, however, the dead are walking instead of dancing. The first subchapter will look into how this personification of death is constructed, as well as how the show handles the topics of life and death. Although all the episodes in *The Walking Dead* deal with this, the discussion will limit itself to a selection of episodes and scenes. The quasi-scientific explanation of what the zombie is in WD106 will serve as a starting-point for the analysis, as it provides valuable information about the apocalypse and man’s possible extinction. This part of the interpretation is followed by a brief account of *The Walking Dead*’s apparent fascination with death, exemplified by a scene in WD308. The ethics concerning life and death is also pursued in the show, and how to perceive the zombie is particularly important in WD207 and WD308. The final topic for the present subchapter is the link between life and death, which inevitably involves the zombie. This link is accentuated in WD301 through the topic of pregnancy and in WD316 through death.

3.1.1 Death, Personified

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* a personification is “a figure of speech by which animals, abstract ideas, or inanimate things are referred to as if they were human” (Baldick) and a paradox is “a person or situation characterized by striking contradictions” (Baldick). As I would like to argue, the presence of zombies is both a

personification and a paradox. The story, and particularly the supernatural story, has the power to portray the impossible, and despite knowing that *The Walking Dead* is fictional to the bone, viewers may question the striking contradiction of walking corpses and that the concept of death is presented in a physical form. This section will look at the paradox and personification of death by examining two scenes from the first season finale. In WD106, the character Dr. Edwin Jenner gives a quasi-scientific explanation of the zombie. How AMC has chosen to create and present this manifestation of death is a natural place to start the analysis of the series, as everything involves the zombie. The present subchapter is the first to analyze the multimodal text, and it therefore includes a brief note on the analytic structure to provide a foundation for the rest of the analysis. Bateman and Schmidt (2012) postulate that the scene or sequence in question must first be elaborated upon by looking at the given features. The shots, camera movements and audio are what shape the impressions for the viewer, and these will be accounted for to begin with. This thesis aims to follow Bateman and Schmidt's lead, and present the given features of the text before interpreting, from the given elements, what the scene is achieving. My interpretation will focus on what elements contribute the most to the viewer's impression of life, death and the zombie.

In WD106, the characters are inside the Center of Disease Control outside Atlanta (the CDC). A scene from this episode is the closest thing the audience gets to an explanation of why the apocalypse has happened and what the zombie is. This scene is almost six minutes long (WD106 18:12-24:10), with shots varying between, on the one hand, medium close ups and big close ups, focusing on one or two characters for brief intervals. On the other hand, we have long shots depicting the work station, all of the characters and a large screen on the wall. This screen is also the focal point for many of the scene's key shots. Several of the shots are still, but often with zooms, showing the expressions on the faces of characters, and almost only with the character Dr. Edwin Jenner does the camera pan or tilt to trace his movements. At one point, Dr. Jenner is shot from a low angle, which is often believed to convey a sense of domination to the depicted (Burton 65). This sense of domination is further enhanced by the audio: Dr. Jenner takes a great part of the conversation, turning it more into a lecture than a dialogue for much of the scene. The dialogue, or lecture, also includes questions from the audience, and Lori, Andrea and the others voice questions that the doctor responds to. Furthermore, the audio is accompanied by a silent piano playing in the background. The music starts as Carl, Rick and Lori's son, sees the screen and asks "Is that a brain?" (18:34) with an amazed expression on his face. The music ends when the power is

turned off and the lecture is over (22:34). By including this light and wondrous tune, the director adds a touch of both melancholy and wonder to the scene, which is abruptly taken away as a more interrogative sequence of the scene begins.

This scene is important because, at least up until season four of *The Walking Dead*, it is the only time we are given an explanation of the zombie. What Dr. Jenner says about the pathogen and the visual presentation on the enlarged computer screen is the only quasi-scientific and quasi-explanations that are offered. The screen presumably shows the insides of a human brain, and this brain is illuminated with a clear blue light that flickers and flares across the whole brain (19:00). Dr. Jenner explains that this is before the test subject died, and further in the scene, the screen is depicted again when the test subject dies. The blue light fades out and is replaced by darkness (20:15). However, the test subject reanimates as a zombie and the screen shows the zombie's brain activity. A dark red light is conveyed here, although only a small part of the brain appears illuminated, and only a few red sparkles travel anywhere (21:35). All the while Dr. Jenner's provides the following explanation: "Dark, lifeless, dead. The frontal lobe, the neocortex – the human part – that doesn't come back. The *you* part. Just a shell driven by a mindless instinct" (22:03). In other words, the less brain activity a person has, the more dead she or he is.

As the scene progresses it becomes clear that Dr. Jenner does not know how the pathogen spreads: "It could be microbial, viral, parasitic, fungal" (22:41). As a consequence, the show does not present the zombie as fully dead, only with different and significantly less brain activity. What causes this change is unknown, and though the test subject is shot in the head, Dr. Jenner does not advocate for this alternative. When Rick, the main character asks if the zombie is alive, Dr. Jenner responds: "You tell me" (21:55). Some inferences can be made based on the given material: the image of the light and sparkling brain was first accompanied by the wondrous music and a close up of Carl's impressed face (18:34). The reanimated brain, on the other hand, was surrounded by medium close ups of disturbed adults, and particularly the character Dale who frowns (21:42), and fading melancholic music. Thus, the construction suggests that a living human brain is a magnificent thing that children can eye closely without danger, whereas the reanimated human brain makes the adults keep their distance. The music suggests that a living brain is a wonderful thing, whereas a dead and reanimated one is simply sad. The series therefore constructs the zombie, and death personified, as indefinable, dangerous and pitiful.

However, the true danger of the zombie becomes clearer as we move into another scene in WD106, bringing up the topic of the breakdown of the world. Dr. Jenner is positive that what they are facing represents the end of mankind: “This is what takes us down. This is our extinction event” (32:15). The CDC is about to run out of fuel, and will self-contaminate when the fuel runs out in order to stop the spreading of the various diseases that have been developed and researched in the facility. Rick’s group desperately wants to escape the building, but Dr. Jenner wants them to stay: “All of you. You know what’s out there – a short, brutal life and an agonizing death” (31:15). The realistic concerns of Dr. Jenner, that he does not wish for Rick’s group to suffer and would rather see them die a quick and painless death without the prospect of reanimating as zombies, do not affect the group’s collective willingness to continue. The characters cling onto life, trying to avoid death at all costs, even though the zombies are everywhere outside the CDC.

This desperate will to start over exists in all postapocalyptic fiction, according to Claire P. Curtis (5). In *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract*, she puts particular emphasis on novels that present a new beginning: “in the chaos of the end comes the opportunity of a new beginning. This new beginning provides a space for exploration and examination of all that we have previously taken for granted: political arrangements, gender norms, social practices” (7). Beyond WD106, the show rarely deals with the causes of the outbreak, which is one way of signaling to the audience that the apocalypse itself is not of great importance. What really matters is how the characters evolve and adapt to the society, which the postapocalyptic universe allows. The way in which postapocalyptic fiction like *The Walking Dead* portrays the striving survivors might suggest that death should be avoided at all costs; since the children and women are crying, death must be frightening. However, what other choice does this narrative have? If all the major characters died at the CDC, the show could not have aired more than the first season. If the characters had adhered to Dr. Jenner’s wish of a sudden and painless death, this would not have caused millions to sit down and watch season after season. The viewers might find death fascinating, but it should preferably walk or dance, not eradicate human kind.

Another way in which *The Walking Dead* evolves around the theme of death is by showing people’s fascination with death. This fascination, and with the phenomenon of the zombie, is particularly evident in one scene in WD308. At this point in the series, a new plot and some new characters have been introduced, and two of them are worth mentioning in this context: Michonne and the Governor. In the scene in question, Michonne is waiting inside the

Governor's house intending to kill him, but then she is distracted by a noise coming from another room. This scene begins with Michonne breaking into the room (25:49). A medium shot captures the character as she proceeds through the door. While at the door, a crane shot is used and the camera moves upwards until it is positioned at the other side of the room, with a high angle shot looking down on her. As the character moves forwards, the camera tracks and pans her movements, so that the final shot of her steps also includes what caught her attention. Apart from Michonne's loud gasp while opening the door, a traditional horror movie soundtrack is included. One wall of the room is shelved with aquariums containing zombie heads. When Michonne has crossed the floor, the camera position is on the topmost shelf, having the same high angle shot looking down on her as the beginning, but since she has moved it is now a medium close up shot.

While Michonne does not seem particularly to welcome the idea of keeping zombies in fish tanks, there might still be a level of fascination in the way she approaches them. The camera mirrors her walk towards them, through panning and tracking, which makes the viewers' approach to the heads mimic that of Michonne's. Neither the character nor the viewer can turn away. This is also demonstrated by the increasing closeness of the shots. When Michonne first enters the room, she is captured in a medium shot, but when she arrives at the fish tanks, she is presented in a medium close up. The viewers thus get closer to Michonne and can relate to the disgust and fascination she feels. Death is a topic all must face in the end, and although it can be both unpleasant and disgusting, it cannot be avoided; the construction of this scene enables this interpretation through its camera movement, shots and audio. Characters in horror-movies are expected to look horror-struck, and the viewers may find themselves grimacing in the same manner. Robert Rawdon Wilson claims that the "disgust-face" is a central element in horror fiction (217). As a consequence, the look of disgust on Michonne's face might not be that different from the viewer's. Furthermore, this sequence can mirror how many viewers might approach *The Walking Dead*: unable to look away, but still repulsed and fascinated by what they see. What to do with these dead people, besides looking at them, is another question entirely, and though death has already enabled the "life" of zombies, does that justify the massacre shown in *The Walking Dead*?

3.1.2 Must the Dead Die?

In almost every episode, we see zombies being exterminated, and even though the characters' killing may be excused whenever the walkers pose a threat, one might ask whether the zombies should be left to fend for themselves in those cases when they do not constitute a threat. The discussion above of the scene from the quasi-scientific research center CDC, made clear that zombies are very unlike human beings: Dr. Jenner states that the zombie is "Just a shell driven by a mindless instinct" (22:03). But does this nonhuman species deserve to die all over again, no matter what? This topic is debated throughout the series, despite the characters' overwhelming tendency to simply try to exterminate the zombie. The present subchapter will look into the scenes where the zombie "activists" speak their minds and advocate for the zombie's right to live its curious afterlife.

In WD207, Rick and his group are at Hershel's farm and wish to stay there. However, if Hershel is going to allow this, Rick's group must adjust to his policy. This is demonstrated in a scene where Rick, Hershel and Jim are helping some zombies get out of a swamp (25:47-26:57). The scene opens with a long shot that shows the characters moving from the woods towards a swamp, and the camera follows their progress through the help of panning as well as a dolly. This shot ends as a very long shot, with a large depth of field at considerable distance from the characters and the two zombies in the swamp. The subsequent shot catches Rick in a medium close up, panning almost 180 degrees with a slight track. The next shots present us with, respectively, close ups of Rick and Hershel, a medium close up of the two of them with the walkers distantly between them and a long shot taken from the reversed angle. These shots have minimal camera movement, which gives the scene movement in concordance with the characters' movements. The ending changes this, as the last shot is a close up of Rick's face that through tilting becomes a close up of his hand catching a pole with a noose. Due to the camera moving in sync with the characters, the scene seems to have a simple construction. This is further enhanced by the audio, which is stripped of everything besides the characters voices, the zombies' grunts and forest sounds. This scene is simple; nothing stands out as extraordinary. The stillness of the camera makes the tilt at the end very sudden and very effective in enhancing Rick's seizing of the pole, perhaps conveying that this is an important act. Furthermore, the sudden vertical tilt may remind one of nodding, a movement signifying agreement.

The importance of Rick's action is also enhanced through the dialogue. The character named Hershel argues in favor of regarding zombies as sick people in need of treatment and understanding. At this point, Rick's group has discovered that Hershel's barn is full of zombies. These are Hershel's friends and family, he keeps them there until the disease, as he understands it, is cured: "There are people out there who haven't been in their right minds, people who I believe can be restored" (26:25). If Rick and his friends want to stay, they have to act according to Hershel's wishes: "It doesn't matter if you see them as human beings anymore. But if you and your people are going to stay here, that's how you're gonna treat them. My farm, my barn, my say" (26:36). Rick accepts that they do not have to kill zombies no matter what and that they may even treat them as human beings. He follows Hershel and simply does as he is told, and the plot mirrors the scene's simple construction by following them as they move. Rick does not argue that the zombie is "lifeless", as Dr. Jenner told him in the first season; he simply accepts that Hershel is his superior and obeys whatever he says. However, some of the shots described above enable another interpretation: Since the walkers are presented as in between Hershel and Rick, one could say that they are what separate them. The ending of this episode, however, involves a zombie massacre. Shane, a character that will be discussed more closely below, does not accept Hershel's point of view and lets all of the zombies out of the barn. In the mass shooting that occurs, it becomes clear to Hershel and his family that the zombies are dangerous and that they have little interest in anything besides devouring flesh. However, it is important to note that the story also argues (briefly) against killing zombies.

Another character that advocates letting the zombies "live" is the young girl Lizzie, although her view is eventually dismissed as delusional. There is a short scene that demonstrates her point of view very clearly. In WD401, when the group has formed a community inside a nearly deserted prison, Lizzie and some other children are playing outside by the fences. The scene opens with a panning close up of zombies, providing an overview of them standing behind a fence. Children's laughter and greetings are heard along with zombie growls. The next shot is positioned behind the kids and shows that there are two fences and a road between them and the zombies. When Carl starts to speak, the frame offers a long shot from the children's side, with dolly movement. This causes the scene to move further away from the zombies and closer to Carl and his friend Patrick who are approaching the other children. This long shot captures all of the children as well as the zombies. The rest

of the scene focalizes the children when they speak, with shots ranging from medium close ups to big close ups.

Carl is captured in most of the close ups in this sequence, and additionally he steers most of the conversation. When he approaches the children, he questions their greeting of the zombies and states the following: “They [the zombies] had names when they were alive. They’re dead now” (16:41). Lizzie argues the opposite: “No they’re not. They’re just different” (16:43). Carl counters that the zombies eat and kill people, suggesting logically that zombies do not deserve names since they kill people. Lizzie disagrees and retorts: “People kill people. They still have names” (16:53). On the one hand, since Carl dominates in most of the conversation and close ups, and is generally constructed as a likeable character, the construction of the scene favors Carl’s opinions over Lizzie’s. This fits nicely with the rest of the plot in season four, as Lizzie ends up killing her younger sister in an attempt to demonstrate that zombies are “different”, rather than dangerous. Already in her conversation with Carl in WD401, Lizzie’s point of view is constructed as delusional, which could also serve to foreshadow her horrible act in WD414. On the other hand, it must also be acknowledged that the narrative allows such sympathetic views of the zombie. This is a point that Christopher Sharrett has failed to notice in his account of *The Walking Dead*; he argues that the current zombie film asserts “that the Other deserves little or no empathy” (63–64). The Other, here exemplified by the zombie, is conveyed at least twice to be deserving of empathy, and despite the general dismissal of these understandings in the fiction, their presence should at least be noted.

The fact that *The Walking Dead* is a show about killing zombies can hardly be disputed, but this does not mean that the dead are presented as deserving to die in every circumstance. In WD213, the character Michonne is introduced and accompanied with two zombies that provide protection and camouflage. She could easily have dispatched of these zombies, but she has use for them. How she goes about protecting herself by the help of these walkers is demonstrated in the opening of WD409 (1:19-3:32). She is standing outside the fences at the prison, killing the zombies as they come nearer her. When she gets close to the prison gates however, her killing stops. The first shot here shows Michonne walking quickly towards the gate and the spiked fence that surrounds it. This very long shot overviews her and two zombies. As the zombies move closer to the fence, a point of view shot is given from the zombies’ perspective. The next shot tracks Michonne’s movements from a side angle, in a medium shot, which is followed by a long shot overviewing Michonne’s climb over the

spiked fence. Then we track the zombies from their point of view as they move closer towards the fence, but just as they approach it, a new point of view shot occurs, this time from Michonne's perspective. The zombies walk straight into a spike each, which stops their movement abruptly. The next shots depict Michonne's movements in several close ups, as she cuts down a rope as well as the arm of one of the walkers.

The following sequence depicts Michonne keeping the zombies in a leash and being able to move among the zombie herd outside without being noticed. As both the zombies are missing their arms and jaws, the viewers are meant to assume that Michonne has mutilated these zombies to her own benefit. What is interesting, however, is that the audio ceases from the first scene to the next. The first scene discussed here is accompanied by severe walker growls, whilst the second has tuned this down significantly. The zombies do not pose a risk to the protagonist any more, so the threatening sound is diminished. The fact that one of the characters has found a way of using the zombies to her benefit, in order to survive, suggests that the show also has an element of "survival of the fittest" to it. Michael Lundblad directs attention towards a Darwinist-Freudian discourse of the jungle to that American literature and culture employ to justify heterosexuality and violence (2). In Michonne's scene, I would like to argue that we see shots that reflect this, especially through the tracking shots and the point of view shots from the zombies' perspective. These shots suggest that the zombies are tracking their prey intently. The camera follows Michonne's movements, just as the walkers do, until the spiked fence stops them. Then it is suitable to show Michonne's point of view, as she has the upper hand; she is "the fittest" and therefore survives. Whether or not the zombies themselves would prefer this new life to death is hard to say. Since Michonne's zombies are now seen to be lacking both their teeth and fingers, rendering them unable to grasp and devour any type of victim, they seem less eager to do so. Whether her treatment of the zombies is better or worse than merely killing them, remains unknown, but it does at least grant the zombie a new life in which it can do the exact opposite of what zombies are normally seen to be doing: instead of posing a threat to human beings, the zombies can offer protection.

Another scene where the topic of death and zombies occurs is in WD308. Above the fascination of death was discussed, and this scene follows up on the things I discussed in the previous section. Michonne is inside the Governor's room, tracing a sound she has just heard. She discovers that it came from a cell. She opens the door and a girl walks out with a bag over her head and a metal chain holding her back. She removes the chain from the girl and

takes the bag off her head. This reveals that the girl is a walker, and Michonne quickly stands up and gets ready to dispose of her. At this point the Governor walks in and begs her to not hurt his little girl. The dialogue between the two is shown by mostly point of view shots, alternating between having Michonne and the Governor as the focal point. Whereas Michonne is continuously shot in close ups, the Governor is shot by increasing closeness, from a medium long shot to a close up. This suggests that the viewers should relate closer to Michonne's perspective than the Governor's. The dialogue captures their different perspectives quite neatly, as the Governor says: "There's no need for her to suffer" (27:45), whereas Michonne responds: "She doesn't have needs" (27:49). Once again, the construction of the scene in *The Walking Dead* suggests that the walkers are not to be treated as living human beings, and that they should be allowed to die as they would have if there had not been an apocalypse. Despite that, the show also presents the sorrow and grief that this killing of the already dead might cause.

3.1.3 Birth and Death

One of the most striking elements of this dystopian television series is that instead of regarding death as being final, it presents the afterlife as a state where you do not know about your former self. Zombies cannot comprehend life as it was before, and are therefore bound to pose a risk even to their loved ones. In this fiction, death no longer leads to a utopia like heaven, instead it leads to hell on earth. If one dies in this universe, those you love the most will, most likely, be the ones who suffer; you will put your loved ones in mortal danger, which makes death even more terrifying and horrible. In one way, *The Walking Dead* can be viewed as a dystopia on earth, contrasted to the utopia of the zombies' previous lives. This section will deal with two scenes that focus on the link between life and death, which in turn also makes the show stand out as dystopian. The first scene occurs in WD301 and deals with Rick's wife Lori and her unborn child. The other scene deals with the death of Andrea in WD316.

The character Lori, who is married to the protagonist Rick, is pregnant. Though the paternity of the child remains unknown, Rick is intent on raising the child as his own together with Lori. However, the prospect of bringing a child into this postapocalyptic world brings out several fearful aspects for Lori, and the character expresses some of these fears in WD301. This scene is mostly formed by big close ups of Lori that make up 65 percent of the

scene. She talks to Hershel about her worries, and he is also captured in a few close ups, whereas the remaining part of the scene consists of medium close ups of the two of them. The camera movement is minimal, and the audio only covers the dialogue between the characters. On the one hand, this could signify that the importance of the shots, which presents most of the variation in this scene, is of importance. On the other hand, this down stripping of everything but the actors makes their performances all the more important. Throughout the scene, the actress Sarah Wayne Callies portrays a nervous and close to hysterical Lori. Her actions and appearance clearly convey that the character is struggling. She is wriggling, breathing heavily, keeping her head and eyes down, and only casting short glances at her conversation partner, before she eventually starts crying. Not only does this performance demonstrate the popular image of the feminine “hysteria”, but it also alludes strongly to the horror classic *Rosemary’s Baby* from 1968 (Polanski).

This horror classic is about Rosemary Woodhouse who becomes pregnant with, she thinks, her husband, but who is, in fact, having the Devil’s child. As already mentioned, Lori does not know who the father is, though the devil is by all likelihood ruled out. We might suspect the father to be Shane, the antagonist of season 2. Her fear concerns having a monster inside, as she expresses at one point: “If we’re all infected, then so’s the baby. So what if it’s stillborn? What if it’s dead inside me right now? What if it rips me apart?” (32:55). The fear of having a ‘devil’ inside is a classic image of the horror genre, along with the monstrous feminine (as in *The Exorcist*), the doppelganger (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) and the child monster (*The Omen*). These tropes are also to a certain extent present in this scene: Lori’s fears dwell on the monstrous feminine of herself, or in other words, she is afraid of her zombieified doppelganger, and the probability of her child becoming a monster. In addition to presenting these classical horror tropes, the scene suggests a reproductive anxiety; as Gerry Canavan elaborates on in connection to the comic books (444). The dangers of pregnancy have increased greatly due to the apocalypse, because death turns everyone into zombies. The characters have no way of knowing if this could mean that babies, too, will turn into zombies inside the mother’s womb.

The role of the woman therefore changes in this postapocalyptic universe. The essence of the feminine, motherhood, appears to be threatened. Lori is experiencing several fears about her pregnancy and the forthcoming birth, and she renders them as follows:

“Then let’s say it lives and I die during childbirth ... Why not? How many women died in childbirth before modern medicine? If I come back, what if I attack it? Or you? Or Rick? Or Carl? If I do, if there is any chance, you put me down immediately. You don’t hesitate. Me, the baby, if we’re walkers, you don’t hesitate and you don’t try to save us. Okay?”
(WD301 33:10).

She is afraid of becoming a zombie herself with the possibility of eating her newborn child, her husband or son. She also worries that her baby might become a zombie thus posing a risk to everyone around her. One could argue that if this were to be the outcome, Dr. Jenner’s opinion of the apocalypse would be true; namely that they are experiencing man’s “extinction event” (WD106 32:15). Additionally, the quote from WD301 can be seen as foreshadowing the events that occur in WD304, when Lori dies during childbirth. She decides that Maggie should go ahead with a cesarean, and due to a lack of instruments and other necessities, Lori dies in order to give birth to her child. In one way, this can be seen as the right thing to do, as labor can be dangerous for both mother and child, and Lori was sure that something was wrong. If the baby had died inside her, it seems likely that it would also have killed its mother, and thus it seems logical for Lori to sacrifice herself in order to ensure that one of them lives. The scene ends tragically with Lori saying a heartbreaking good-bye to her eldest son, Carl, before he shoots her in the head.

While Lori uses her understanding of life and death to ensure the survival of someone else, the show also depicts characters doing the exact opposite. The Governor is the antagonist through almost two full seasons of *The Walking Dead*, and in WD316, he forces his understanding of life and death on two other characters: “In this life now, you kill or you die. Or you die and you kill” (5:25). When viewing this scene impartially, the shots vary greatly and all the characters are presented in close ups and long shots. This makes it difficult to find a system or meaning to the construction based on the shots alone. However, the opening shots are point of view shots, where Andrea and the Governor are positioned directly across from each other (2:45). They are as far away from each other as possible, like opposing poles on a binary. This remains throughout the scene, as the character Milton is the only one who moves around in the scene. The opening shots also capture Andrea from a high angle and the Governor from a low angle. In other words, the audience looks down on Andrea and up to the Governor, which adds to the power dynamic of the scene. The audio covers the characters’ dialogue and movements, but it also contains a low rumbling bass. This eerie music is tuned down from the start of the scene until it escalates with heavy piano tunes when Milton gathers some tools behind Andrea. The intervals of the piano give a sense

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of suspension, or maybe even doom. As he walks back to the Governor the music increases in volume, and it climaxes when the Governor stabs Milton (4:50). It quickly fades out with the Governor's repeated stabbing, leaving an ominous silence in its place.

Another thing that stands out is the lighting of the scene. Andrea, a character the audience has followed for three seasons, sits bound to a chair and is bathed in light. The Governor stands by the doorway for most of the scene, and his face is partially lit and partially in shadow. The character Milton moves around the most, and therefore his lighting changes, but for most of the shots he is in the dark. Hence, the lighting constructs, or at least enhances, how the viewers relate to the onscreen characters. Andrea was part of Rick's group for two seasons, and she tries to establish peace in the war between the Governor's group and Rick's group. And throughout the scene, she is put in the spotlight. Her innocence and goodness in the matter are communicated effectively. Whereas the Governor, who for several episodes has been portrayed as an antagonist with two personalities, is quite literally split in two: one side of his face is in the light and the other in the dark.

What the Governor establishes in this episode is summarized in link referenced initially: "In this life now, you kill or you die. Or you die and you kill" (5:25). He orders Milton to kill Andrea, and when he refuses, the Governor stabs him. Inevitably, Milton dies from the wounds, turns into a zombie and kills Andrea despite his original intention. Andrea lives as long as Milton lives, and when he dies she will die too. And the latter is what eventually happens at the end of the episode, proving to the viewers that even though they fought their destiny and tried to change the Governor's reality, they failed. The Governor's view of life is that you must kill your enemies in order to survive or else your enemies will kill you, which in turn will make you into a zombie killing machine. As the show progresses, it is evident that the Governor's opinion has an element of truth to it, and this episode suggests that he was right.

What Lori's and the Governor's understandings have in common is the fact that death causes more deaths. In most situations, the characters are able to handle and cope with this fact, but in some cases the prospect of death really is inevitable in this fiction. That is why it can be seen as truly dystopian: there is no way out and no turning back. We see that the characters deal with this in very different ways: the Governor is using it as an excuse to kill whereas Lori is using it to save someone's life. At the same time, the prospect of the zombies is always just around the corner, making all these scenes serve as exciting cliff-hangers entertaining the audience.

3.2 The Other and Zombies

NEVER AGAIN, NEVER TRUST. WE FIRST, ALWAYS.

Writing on the walls at Terminus in WD416 (34:40)

This subchapter will investigate how *The Walking Dead* constructs the Other, and argue that it does so in three different ways by having a monstrous Other, an external, living Other, and by having someone inside the group become an Other. The show presents a postapocalyptic and dystopian universe, where all that humanity has developed during the scientific, technological, industrial and political revolutions appear lost. This is due to the emergence of the zombie whose origin could be a result of man's mindless drive for progress or nature's own work. What this fiction allows, on the other hand, is a figure at which man can direct his frustration of disorientation and relieve his sense of crisis; namely the figure of the Other. Although the show presents some "facts" about the nature of the zombie, particularly in the quasi-scientific episode WD106 that takes place at the Center of Disease Control, the figure of the zombie is definitely open for interpretation. Depending on the individual viewer's perspective, the zombie can be viewed as a personification of Death, or man's fear of Death, which was elaborated upon earlier, or as a terrible result of man's mindless drive for progress or nature's revenge on man, which will be explored in the next subchapter. Finally, the zombie can also be seen as a representation the societal Other, which is the approach of the present interpretation. Whereas existing literature on the horror genre tends to emphasize an understanding of the concept of the Other as a return of the repressed, *The Walking Dead* also invites one to consider how the West continues to define itself in opposition to the rest of the world.

3.2.1 The Monstrous Other

One way in which the horror genre has developed the Other is through portraying the monster. Robin Wood completed an analysis of American horror films that developed the Other, or the monster, in the 1960s and 1970s. In his influential work *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, Wood reads the monster as a return of something repressed, and states that the monster threatens normality in horror narratives (78). In the same manner, the monsters in *The Walking Dead* are abundant and threatening to normality, and can thus be read as something repressed, which makes the allegorical potential is great. This chapter will

look into the construction of the monstrous Other, namely the zombie, in *The Walking Dead*, and try to unveil what it represents in terms of being a return of something that has been repressed in contemporary Western society.

The walkers in *The Walking Dead* were living human beings once so they resemble the characters somewhat, at least on the outside, but they lack the essential human characteristics of speech, intellect and consciousness. In many ways this Other relates to Nicholas Royle's understanding of the uncanny: the feelings invoked by this Other are a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity; and as Royle explains it "[The uncanny] can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context" (1). This understanding of the Other opens up for additional Others, such as everyone outside the group. Rick's group hardly identifies with other groups or lonely outsiders: everyone outside the group is presented as another Other to the group identity. Furthermore, we have the individual characters that might be understood as an Other within the group, characters that are alive and in the group, but differ from the major character in various ways. All of these Others are tightly linked to a feeling of anxiety or fear since the protagonists look at the zombies, other groups and some group-members as constituting a threat. This fear, of everyone dead or alive differing from oneself, is clearly established both in dialogue and visually, and this chapter will investigate how *The Walking Dead* achieves this.

One zombie by itself, despite its Otherness, does not pose a big threat. The threat becomes real as the number of zombies increases. One example of this is shown in WD213 when Hershel's farm is overrun by a horde of walkers. The opening of this episode follows a zombie walk starting in a town when a helicopter passes. The zombies obviously have both hearing abilities and well functioning vision: a zombie is peering upwards in a big close up accompanied by the audio of a helicopter (0:27), and in the following shot the viewers share the zombie's perspective, and see both her and the helicopter. She then starts to walk towards the sound and in the general direction of the helicopter, and the next medium long shots depict other zombies leaving a coyote and joining her. In the following scenes, the audience understands that time passes due to the bright daylight in the first scene, followed by a second scene showing the zombies walking during nighttime, a third scene shot in daylight and, finally, the zombies are being portrayed at night again. Additionally, the group of zombies has grown from being approximately 10 (at 0:45) to becoming too many to count (at 1:20). The use of light to illustrate time passing serves to demonstrate how big a zombie horde can

get while walking for approximately 36 hours. During this march the zombies have presumably chased the sound of the helicopter, but they are presented with a new sound when they hear the gunshot fired by Carl to exterminate the reanimated Shane (at 2:40).

Edward Said argues that the West constructs the East, or the “Orient”, by looking at it as an Other to oneself (1). Such binary opposition of the Self versus the Other is demonstrated throughout *The Walking Dead*. This enormous herd of zombies represents different classes, races and genders, and the audience is led to believe that the zombie pathogen takes no heed of your personal background before infecting you. The opening of WD213 presents respectively, a dead girl, a doctor, a man wearing a suit, a man in work-wear, a woman in a night gown, another woman in a miniskirt and many other costumes denoting different social statuses, or, as Fiske would call it, presenting the audience with a range of material social codes (1279). The horde also appears to consist of (dead) people of varying ethnic descent, and their deadness is what contrasts the zombies from the group. Consequently, it is difficult to argue that the zombie represents a minority in society. This produces a difficulty in establishing whether the zombie, as an Other, is reflecting a repressed minority group in the West or not. So who is this monstrous Other?

Based on the zombies’ outward appearance, one could argue that their “societal” status is highly ambiguous. On the one hand, they look like filthy outcasts. The zombie is dead and therefore has no blood pumping in its veins, which makes the skin look paler and greyer than with human beings (naturally, this is achieved by extensive use of masks, makeup and costumes). Furthermore, the zombie is not very hygienic; most of them are covered with filth, mud, blood and other excrements. Thirdly, many zombies are walking around with extensive injuries caused by the trauma that resulted in their death. In fact, *The Walking Dead* hired 13 people to complete the walker makeup in this episode (Imdb.com). The show invests great efforts in creating its zombies, which is evident when watching this herd. A horizontally panning close up gives the viewer a possibility to scrutinize a selection of the zombies (2:02). These pale, filthy and wounded people all demonstrate the points mentioned here, and at least three walkers show signs of injuries caused by being eaten and scratched. If one were to apply Fiske’s classic theory on how to represent social codes in visual media, one would find that the zombies are portrayed according to the codes of villainy. These codes, in simple terms, say that the shabbier and unattractive a character is portrayed, the more likely it is one of the villains in the narrative (1728). As the walkers in *The Walking Dead* clearly are not

meant to be seen as attractive, in any way, their presentation will inevitably lead to the audience to conceive of them as villains.

Fearing the Other or Fearing the Terrorist

In *Gothicka*, Victoria Nelson discusses the extent to which *The Walking Dead* reflects current ideas about the threat of terrorism (157). She states that the comics present a generalized war trauma, and connects this to 9/11 by pointing to an interview in *GQ* where Kirkman states that these events definitely were a big part of that which inspired his writing (ibid.). These attacks led to the most extensive warfare the U.S. has ever seen, and thus, according to Nelson, the zombie apocalypse represents, among other things, the collective purgation in the U.S. in the aftermath of 9/11 (ibid.). The fear of the Other, and the characters' understanding of them as Others to themselves, can link to certain aspects of the terrorist: the first and foremost tool of the terrorist is the fear he inspires, which is also very appropriate for the zombie. Despite the zombies' lack of knowledge of its power, the fear of them leads to drastic changes in the characters' lives. Another point worth noting is that 9/11 led to a drastic change for the U.S. society, just like the characters' world have changed dramatically.

One aspect of the post-9/11 purgation that the show arguably mimics is The War on Terror. "Now, if y'all want to live, if you want to survive. You got to fight for it! I'm talking about fighting right here, right now." (WD207 35:14). The protagonists of *The Walking Dead* are not in any doubt as to whether they are at war or not, and they do not refrain from invading the places they desire to enter. Furthermore, the dehumanization of the zombie might also reflect the dehumanization of Islamic terrorists in media. Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills shed light upon the dehumanizing discourse by the Canadian media covering The War on Terror (9). The method used by journalists to cover stories on Saddam Hussein, and increasingly also the Arab and Muslim population, is to refer to them as animals, insects and diseases (ibid). In the same way, the zombies are also given a whole new terminology, where none of the terms suggest humanization of the zombie. As Taylor Coe presents in the Oxford blog, the terminology of zombies includes geeks, lamebrains, lurkers, roamers, floaters, biters and walkers. This dehumanizing language, combined with the dehumanizing portrayal of the zombie, arguably parallels to the dehumanizing discourse that Steuter and Wills present. Shane is very outspoken and shouts his understanding of the zombies to the other characters: "These things ain't sick. They're not people. They're dead. Ain't gonna feel nothing for them 'cause all they do, they kill. These things right here, they're the things that

killed Amy. They killed Otis. They're gonna kill all of us" (WD207 34:08). Not only are the walkers established as "things" and "not people", but they are presented as a threat. The zombies have already killed people they knew, and who some loved, and they will eventually kill all the characters and turn them into zombies. Quite possibly, Kirkman and the other creators of *The Walking Dead* might have been inspired by the dehumanized discourse characterizing much of the post-9/11 media debate about the alleged "Muslim threat". As formerly mentioned, Kirkman has stated that he was inspired by 9/11 when creating the comics in the first place.

There are some problems with Nelson's comments on *The Walking Dead*, however, and in particular involving two of her claims. She defines the show as an expression of the collective purgation post-9/11, and additionally argues that *The Walking Dead* is a part of forming a fundament for new religious movements (xii). The first argument is problematic due to the concept of catharsis, where "the sub-Zeitgeist cathartic working through, in the realm of the imaginary, of 9/11 and its consequences" (157) implies that the process should purify something. This is not reflected by the show, the apparent lack of anything purified, both literally and metaphorically, gives little ground to Nelson's point of view. The characters are faced with a world where everything from their clothes to their morals can be understood as impure. The other is difficult to support fully, as all religious characters die and every character's morals deteriorate. Though Nelson creates a connection between the terror attack of 9/11 and *The Walking Dead*, one might struggle to find evidence for all her claims.

Another point worth noting is that the show often covers the loss of loved ones and homes to the Other. Examples of links between the War on Terror and the AMC's series are given above, but there is also a recurring theme of the loss of one's home, which does not reflect the War on Terror specifically, but gives support to view the show as a generalized war trauma. The characters are never safe for long: in WD105, they lose the camp outside Atlanta to the zombies; the CDC self-contaminates in WD106; Hershel's farm is overrun in WD213; they try to take refuge in an abandoned house in WD301; and the prison is attacked by the antagonists in WD408. Although these events also are consequences of the apocalypse and work as narrative techniques driving the plot forwards, the theme of not having a secure base to return to is nonetheless repeated over and over again. The loss of one's home does not correspond to the terrorist attacks, but it does resemble the homelessness a war can create. While it has been more than half a century since a Western country was occupied in a war-conflict, *The Walking Dead* still problematizes the loss of one's home and not being able to

live life as they used to, due to the Others' presence. As a consequence, the television series also presents the Other as an occupant, an unwanted occupant that is problematic to understand and relate to. This topic will be further pursued below in 3.3.

The loss of one's home, culture and way of living could also express the cultural phenomenon of xenophobia. The fear of other cultures is present in the West; the rising of movements such as Pegida demonstrates that an anxiety for immigration, and particularly Islamic immigration, is developing. One could argue that *The Walking Dead*, to some degree, confronts this anxiety and also might be interpreted symbolically as the dystopian vision of "Eurabia" that organizations like Pegida envision when they address their subjective understanding of Islamic immigration. Thus, a way to view the show is to think of losing one's home, standard of living and being, metaphorically, swallowed up by the immigrating culture. Islamophobia stands out as a potential anxiety in Western culture, one already mentioned above in relation to terrorism. One scene that invites such interpretation is when Lizzie, the young girl mentioned in 3.1.2, tries to become friends with the zombies. Her attitude towards the zombies is open-minded, she sees them as different rather than dangerous. In WD414, she explains her view of the walkers: "They just want me to change. They can make me be like them. Maybe I should change ... I can make you all understand" (19:45). Even though Lizzie is portrayed as psychotic and mistaken in her views, the quote still shows that this character is open towards what could be a representation of immigrants. The other characters begin to fear her as well, due to her views differing so much from their own. Lizzie simply wants the other characters to take her opinions seriously, and she is willing to take extreme measures to demonstrate her views. The fact that this gets brutally shot down in the plot, just leaves an understanding that the narrative has no intention of opening up for this view. The Other should not be understood, and if one tries, the narrative puts an end to it. Furthermore, as both Lizzie and her sister Mica die in this episode, the theme of losing one's children and the loss of futurity is enhanced further.

The fear of the Other in Western society is an established fear, and one way this is proven is by the establishment of gated communities. As Michael A. Scaperlanda, in an article about U.S. immigration law, says:

For as long as people have desired to migrate, others have created barriers to migration, prohibiting exit or refusing entry. Fear, protection of domestic labor, ethnic or religious purity, and multiple other factors contribute to migration barriers. Legalized segregation, zoning, deed restrictions, and gated communities create local barriers to entry in communities across the globe. (524)

Even though there has been some research showing that gated communities do not establish a safer environment, the number of such communities is increasing in the U.S. (Low 103). In *The Walking Dead*, all of the residences the characters set up appear as gated communities. The best example of this occurs in season three when the group settles down in a prison. The fences, walls and towers for keeping watch are seen as major advantages in their universe, and it seems as though many people in Western countries also are of the same opinion. However, as the prison is so valuable, it becomes increasingly attractive for the living who are not its residents. As the finale of season 3 establishes, the prison is in fact unsafe.

As formerly mentioned, Christopher Sharrett argues that the current zombie film, including *The Walking Dead*, asserts “that the Other deserves little or no empathy” (63). Though the Other, in this context exemplified by the zombie, clearly poses a threat and is often killed, this thesis already has established how some characters advocate for zombies. What has not been addressed, however, is other ways of empathizing for a zombie, when it is constructed as having no thoughts or feelings. According to what Dr. Jenner says in WD106, a zombie is “Just a mindless shell, driven by instinct” (22:03). Therefore, most the acts of empathy and sympathy displayed are directed towards the living humans the zombies once were. Secondly, the general prospect of becoming a zombie seems unpleasant for most of the characters, which makes a shot in the head stand out as a more dignified way to treat a corpse than laying it to rest and rise; an act that resembles euthanasia. Consequently, the zombies receive empathy for who they once were and the thoughts and feelings they had when they were alive are worth something in this fictional world. Since the narrative presents a non-thinking and non-feeling zombie, it would be difficult to take its thoughts and feelings into consideration, as the denotation of the word empathy suggests the characters should.

There are several examples showing that the zombie, despite being an Other, receives empathy and sympathy. In WD207, the whole group grieves for Sophia’s death as a human and as a zombie (39:50); Michonne ends the life of Hershel’s zombieified head in WD409 (2:45); and in WD101, we see Rick ending the life of a zombie consisting solely of a torso (46:20). The will of the person triumphs the will of the zombie. All these examples demonstrate that there is something missing in Sharrett’s account: empathy and sympathy, though not overflowing in the show, is nonetheless present. However, it is strongly implied in the show that very few would choose to live as a reanimated corpse. When characters rise as reanimated corpses, the audience will likely view the killing of these zombies as acts of mercy. One example stands out to the contrary: in WD105, the character Jim is left behind to

live his afterlife just as his zombie-self pleases (though it later becomes known that the zombies in this universe are never pleased or allowed any feelings). Furthermore, when Rick kills a zombie torso in the first episode, he actually phrases his empathy as follows: “I’m sorry this happened to you” (WD101 46:13).

3.2.2 The External Other

The Other is constructed in another way when the characters meet other groups or individuals. The difference between the group identity, the “us”, and everyone else as “them” is striking throughout the show, the further into the series one gets, the more striking this becomes. In the beginning, Rick does not seem as dismissive towards others as he does in season 4, which proves that the wall between the “us” and “them” grows higher and higher as the show progresses. All the people outside Rick’s group are outsiders, Others and potential threats to the group. One example of this is given in WD208, when Rick, Hershel and Glenn are in a local bar. As they are about to leave, two men enter the bar (32:11). The audio gives their entry away before the frame does, and the camera pans 180 degrees with Rick and Hershel in the shot. What was a big close up of the two becomes a long shot of the new characters positioned in between the shoulders of Rick and Hershel. In other words, this entrance visually makes Dave and Tony, as the newcomers are called, stand between Rick and Hershel. As the audience is given closeness to Rick and Hershel and distance to the newcomers, they will most likely side with Rick and Hershel. Dave and Tony are soon constructed as different from the protagonists, and one way the creators achieve this is through the dialogue. Their language, occurring straight after a scene where Hershel questions himself at a deep and religious level, stands out as offensive and insulting. “Son of a bitch”, “douchebag” and “eat me” are expressions Dave and Tony use from the start, which creates a vigorous breach with the tone from the previous scene. Dave initiates the conversation and quickly establishes an inquisitional role and after less than a minute on screen he calls the other characters his friends. On the other side, Rick answers his questions reluctantly and does not corroborate Dave’s friendliness.

At one point, Tony walks across the bar to urinate and by doing so he arguably breaks a code for what the audience, and Rick, Hershel and Glenn, deem as acceptable behavior. This is further enhanced by the camera work, as the audio gives the sound of tripling liquid and a big close up of Tony’s feet and a pool of supposed urine is shown (36:05). Dave seems

unaffected by his friend's urination, apparently this is deemed acceptable behavior for him, which is not so astounding: toilets must have stopped functioning due to the apocalypse and the breakdown of society. For the audience, however, who have toilets and live in a culture where body fluids are deemed close to unnatural, these shots might be deemed as disgusting. Robert Rawdon Wilson explores the disgusting in *The Hydra's Tale* and states that "Disgust is always, no matter what claims are made, a question of boundaries that you experience as being crossed" (79). By constructing the scene according to breaking boundaries, the characters Tony and Dave are viewed as antagonists by the audience. These characters break boundaries with their words, actions and requests, and make it easy for the characters to sympathize with Rick when a conflict escalates. Not only has the camera positioned them as intruders from the very beginning, but it has continued with it by relying on big close ups. In this case, the use of big close ups give the audience what Fiske would phrase as "dominant specularity", which means that the audience get to see through the villain's character (1278). In other points in this thesis, it is argued the big close up is used to establish intimacy with characters: but when the big close up is used upon Tony and, particularly, Dave, it gives the audience another impression entirely. Instead of constructing a feeling of being included in an intimate setting, the shots serve to reveal the inner character, in other words, let the audience see who Dave really is. The contrast between the big close up of Hershel and Rick in the preceding scene and the close ups of Dave and Tony make it striking.

The external Other is continuously developed throughout the show, and in season 3 and part of season 4, a character called the Governor and his groups are the threatening force. In season 3, the Governor and his first group are located at Woodbury, a small town relatively close to the prison. This character is portrayed as having several faces or roles, which is demonstrated through his names in the show: the Governor, Philip and Brian. This suggests that this character lacks a core identity and simply dons a mask or a role that suits him at the time. This is epitomized in WD308, through the character Andrea and her understanding of him (3:53–5:00). The theme song fades out and the scene that opens show Andrea fixing her hair in front of a mirror. The frame gives a close up of Andrea's reflection in the mirror, and the camera zooms out presenting the mirror frame. As Andrea looks down and picks up a framed picture from the table, the camera changes position. We are now at a high angle looking down on the picture, but still with Andrea's blurred reflection in the mirror. The frame shifts again after a few seconds, focusing on Andrea, while blurring the picture she looks down at. The audio in this scene covers the characters movements and

conversation, and particularly footsteps stand out as important. The sound of the Governor approaching causes Andrea to put the picture down and return to fixing her hair. The shot changes to a very long shot from across the room, showing the Governor's movements across the spacious room.

As he closes up to Andrea, the shot changes to a over the shoulder shot from Andrea's perspective: a medium close up shows the reflection of the happy couple in the mirror discussing Andrea's plans for the day. The camera holds this shot until the couple kisses, which it zooms in to portray. Andrea leaves after this, but the zoom continues inwards which changes the shot to become a close up of the Governor. He is standing still while Andrea is leaving the room, looking grimly at himself and making a slight grimace. When the audio covers the sound of a door closing, he turns his head to see if he is alone. To summarize, the characters are portrayed in close ups when they are alone, suggesting that then the audience can see who the characters really are. Neither character reveals their true self in the other's presence, and Andrea's view of them as a couple is somewhat distant. As soon as the Governor comes closer, Andrea changes her behavior, which is the exact same thing that the Governor does at Andrea's departure. Another thing worth noting is that the scene focalizes the reflection of the characters instead of the characters, and the scene portrays how the characters see themselves separately and together. The importance of appearances and how things are perceived is thus emphasized throughout this scene. The picture Andrea looks at is also another aspect of this, as it shows the Governor with his family laughing, presumably before the apocalypse. His happiness in the picture is, however, just as questionable as his happiness in the mirror. The multiple personalities of this character may remind one of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, only that *The Walking Dead* has added yet another personality.

3.2.3 The Internal Other

The previous section dealt with the Others that pose a threat to Rick's group from the outside. However, there are also some threats from characters inside the group, and a presence of the Other can also be understood to be inside the protagonists, at least for Michonne and Rick. This section will start by looking at the character Shane, who initially was not an Other to the group, but their leader. He has protected Rick's wife and son and most likely saved Rick's life by putting a bed in front of his door in the hospital, so that the zombies stayed out of his room. However, when this story begins, Shane and Lori have started to have an affair (though

believing Rick to be dead, since it is highly improbable that one would survive an apocalypse while being comatose). When Rick finds his family, the affair ends abruptly and Shane is no longer the Alpha-male of the group, which makes him deteriorate into an antagonist within the group.

WD207 is an episode where Shane's behavior stands out as antagonistic. At this point in the narrative, Rick and his group are gathered outside Hershel's farm and they have discovered that Hershel keeps zombies in the barn. As Rick tries to compromise Hershel's understanding of the zombies with their own, Shane disapproves and wants to eliminate the zombies immediately. In order to kill the zombies, Shane needs guns, but the character Dale hides the guns to prevent this. However, Shane tracks him down and the two confront each other (29:35–32:13). This scene opens with a panning long shot, situating Dale in the forest while trying to bury the guns, and turns into an over the shoulder shot from Shane's perspective. The characters are situated far across from each other, as depicted through point of view shots. Shane starts to walk, and the camera tracks and pans him approaching Dale. As Shane gets closer, he positions himself higher up than Dale, making the succeeding point of view shots have a high angle from Shane's perspective and a low angle from Dale's. When the dialogue between the two ends, Shane is the one leaving. Throughout the scene, the audio covers their conversation, movements and forest sounds.

The movements of the character Shane demonstrate intrusion and impatience. He invades the panning overview shot, just as he interrupts Dale. He does not listen to Dale and tells him repeatedly to "shut up" (30:46). The expressions on his face, his mocking attitude and rivaling of Dale here, and Rick elsewhere, present him as the most obvious (living) antagonist of season 2. The filmic features mentioned above also enhance this by presenting Dale in an inferior angle and Shane in a dominant one, where Shane is positioned higher than the "prey" he (and the camera) has tracked. Dale is outspoken in his judgment: "This world. What it is now. This is where you belong. I may not have what it takes to last for long, but that's okay. At least I can say: when the world goes to shit, I didn't let it take me down with it!" (31:40). Furthermore, not only is Shane's dialogue often filled with slang and swear words, but his appearances in most scenes are configured as more beastly than the others: the opening of this episode situates the group eating breakfast, and Shane's eating habits are strikingly less civilized than the others (00:20). To phrase it differently, Shane poses a threat to the group identity when they have Rick as their leader, and is thus constructed as an

antagonist for several episodes. He deteriorates to survive the apocalypse, but later we will see that so does Rick.

The Walking Dead also sporadically presents the protagonist as an Other, and one example of this occurs with the character Michonne in WD409. At this point, the Governor's second attack on the prison has made it uninhabitable; the group has fled and is dispersed across the surrounding area. Michonne is the last to leave the prison, and how she left was commented upon in the analysis above in 3.1.2. The present scene occurs further into the episode, and it shows Michonne and her two escorts walking amidst a zombie herd (30:31). The scene opens with a very long shot overlooking the herd and Michonne. Succeeding this a medium shot of Michonne shows her walking behind her leashed zombies in the middle of the herd. The camera tracks her movements, and the following shots are either close ups of her or panning point of view shots that present the herd from her perspective. The audio covers the growls of the zombies and a desolate piano in the background. There is no talking for the first minute.

Due to the point of view shots and close ups of Michonne's facial expressions, and the lack of other action, Michonne's surroundings and her reactions are of importance for the first minute. Particularly one zombie is focalized at this point, and this walker resembles Michonne. They both have dark skin tones, long dreads and similarities in their physicality and height. The only obvious difference is that one of them is dead, while the other is alive. However, they are walking in the same herd, heading in no general direction. Michonne does not seem to like this, due to the expressions on her face, and it is likely to be because she also sees how the zombie resembles herself. Arguably, Michonne discovers that the difference between herself and the walker is not that big. They are walking side by side in the direction of wherever. They look the same and act the same. Phrased differently, the zombie look-alike gives the character an opportunity of seeing herself from the outside as she is now, while it also simultaneously proposes her future if she should turn into a zombie. That the viewers are meant to understand this seems likely, due to the focalization of both Michonne and her zombie-double. The difference between them is as big as life and death, but at the same time they are doing the very same thing: walking without a general direction, goal or feeling. Michonne does not want this for herself, neither in life nor in death, and this is clearly demonstrated as she assassinates all the walkers while screaming: "No!" (31:25). After this she decides to act as a living person again: she tracks down Rick and Carl by returning to the footprints she decisively ignored earlier.

To fight the beast lurking inside is nothing new to horror fiction, and arguably this is also portrayed in *The Walking Dead*. Christopher Sharrett writes the following: “Instead of the zombie film asking questions basic to the horror genre like ‘who are the REAL monsters?’ the contemporary zombie films revels in the notion of human beings as targets in a shooting gallery” (63). Although Sharret might be correct in pointing out that *The Walking Dead* portrays a shooting gallery with human-like targets, the show also definitively deals with the concept of human monsters. Kyle William Bishop deals with this topic in particular, though in connection to the comic book version of *The Walking Dead* (Kirkman). In “Battling Monsters and Becoming Monstrous: Human Devolution in *The Walking Dead*”, Bishop argues that one of the key themes in the comic books is the protagonists’ deteriorating humanity (74). He continues: “The value of the monster thus lies in its role as a cultural monstium, a metaphorical figure that ‘reveals’ and ‘warns’ of something else, something larger than itself” (75). The link between the two versions of this apocalyptic universe is, as mentioned earlier, relatively strong and Bishop’s points are also valid for the television series. As a consequence, certain aspects of Sharrett’s argumentation fall short.

That human characters become monstrous is evident from the first season of the show, and this is clearly demonstrated by the main character, Rick. This character starts out as a fierce and just protector, but develops into enjoying the brutality his protective role enables. The other characters turn to him in need and seem to place trust, more or less, in his capabilities. An example of this is given in WD208, when Rick takes responsibility to bring Hershel safely back to the farm. In the process of retrieving Hershel from the bar, they meet Dave and Tony who clearly are constructed as villains. They pose a threat to Rick, Glenn and Hershel, and when they draw their guns, Rick is quick to retaliate. This episode ends with Rick looking at the dead body of Tony, accompanied with the Clutch’s song “The Regulator”: “I see that lantern trimmed low burning in our home and though I feel like crying, I swear tonight, I’ll cry no more” (39:45). This event is the first where Rick actually has to kill living people to protect himself and his group, and despite him seeing these actions as necessary, Rick does not like to kill. However, already at the end of season two Rick’s morals start deteriorating, and WD213 ends with Rick establishing his role as the group’s dictator: “This isn’t a democracy anymore” (39:20). His values and morals deteriorate further, which become evident by the end of season four. In WD416, he, Michonne and Carl are separated from the rest and encounter a hostile group of men. These antagonists outnumber the three of them, but this does not stop Rick. One antagonist is threatening to

assault both Michonne and Carl sexually, which clearly pushes Rick over the limit. After he has killed several of the group members in the Other group, he wants to kill the potential rapist himself: “He’s mine” (13:28). This aims to show that some of the deaths on the show are for the killer’s pleasure, and that Rick has (d)evolved from being a character that dislikes to kill to becoming someone who wants to kill.

3.3 The West and Zombies

*And the world runs on fossil fuels, I mean ... how **stupid** is that?*

Dr. Jenner, WD106 (27:55)

The Walking Dead is set in the United States of America, specifically in the state of Georgia and its surroundings, but it is not the U.S. that we know. The U.S. can be seen as the major exponent of some key trends in Western culture at large, which could mean that the U.S. here is a synecdoche for the Western world. In many ways, the U.S. has evolved into becoming a symbol of certain traits of Western society, particularly due to its emphasis on capitalist economy, material consumption and new technology. The imprint American culture has had on the rest of the world is tremendous: brands like McDonalds, Starbucks and Apple are spread across the globe, and especially in Western countries. Thus, American trademarks can also be seen as Western trademarks, which might enable an American show to reflect Western, and not specifically American, culture. This subchapter will interpret the show with relevance for Western culture.

The traditional fear and understanding of the Other often equal the West with the “Self” and the “Other” with other parts of the world, e.g. the East or the “Orient” (Said 1–2). Robin Wood takes this a step further by demonstrating how a psychoanalytic approach can reveal that the Otherness is what is repressed within the self (73). Additionally, the binary opposition often occurs within a Western population, where the majority population is the “We” and the minorities are portrayed as “Them”. The previous subchapter pursued this understanding to a certain extent, but here a different approach to the Other will be taken: as the walkers or zombies have reduced the living into a minority, by simply eating and killing the living, the majority is now made up of zombies. Despite the viewers’ investment and identification with the living characters: a majority is still a majority. Therefore, the majority in the show could also be viewed as reflecting the majority of a Western country, and their

Otherness can be a part of the Western “Self”. Hence, the zombies could mirror what one would traditionally see as “us”, the “self” or “we”.

Another interesting observation is that zombie pathogen takes no heed of your “societal status”, and death as well as zombie reanimation can befall everyone in this fiction. Thus, *The Walking Dead* emerges as a contemporary expression of the well-known medieval motif the *Dance of Death*, or *La Dance Macabre*, where “all estates” are dancing with or in death (Appleford 65). The same motif is conveyed in numerous images throughout the show as each zombie herd represents a variety of people marching together in death. This subchapter will pursue this approach through three topics *The Walking Dead* portrays in its cliffhanger episodes. The section opens with an explanation of the urban dystopia and a dystopian civilization, and the referenced episodes are WD101 and WD309. The second topic discussed looks into what could be the show’s critique of Western consumerism in WD101 and WD401, and links it to other horror films that deal with this topic. The third and final analysis looks at how *The Walking Dead* treats eating and cannibalism, which is very latent in every zombie narrative, with examples from WD101, WD201 and WD206.

3.3.1 Dystopian Civilizations

The television series discussed here is by no means a lovely tale, and as established earlier the show can easily be viewed as dystopian. Moreover, inside the fictional universe of *The Walking Dead*, there are far more zombies in urban areas than in the countryside. This may add to the idea of zombies allegorically representing the Western population, because there generally are more people living in cities than in rural areas in the West. In the very first episode, WD101, we are faced with a menacing urban dystopia when Rick rides into the city of Atlanta. The opening of this sequence is a crane shot looking down on Rick, followed by a big close up (55:34). His eyes wander and he has a grim expression on his face. The succeeding reverse angle shot is a very long shot that shows Rick’s horseback ride up the highway, and on the other side of the road we see a massive queue of broken down cars: all trying to exit the city. This image is additionally on the DVD cover of the first season, as well as the ending shot of the theme song up until the end of season two. Thus it is repeated over and over again, which enhances its importance. The tall buildings surrounding him seem to be completely abandoned and bear clear signs that some kind of war has taken place, with their broken windows and soot-stained walls. As Rick moves further into the city, the

audience sees that the streets are empty apart from litter and broken cars, helicopters, misplaced road-blockers, burned buses and trashed military vehicles (56:50). The audio covers nothing but the hooves of his horse and the rustling wind.

In many ways, this street accords with Henri Lefebvre's proposed fear of the urban dystopia: "the street may be emptied out, reduced to circulation and pure flow, and become a desert" (Pinder 216). This famous quote, though addressing the arrival of the car in the 1960s, can also describe the urban dystopia in *The Walking Dead*. The street no longer "embodies the everyday in condensed form, with more life than the places it links together" (Pinder 216–217); the streets Rick rides on are empty (and later, they are filled with dead people); the places the street links together are desolated; and the urbanity that Lefebvre sought to preserve is lost. At the same time, the streets still fulfill their basic function in terms of infrastructure, as the streets are reduced to circulate a herd of zombies flowing after the protagonist, and although Lefebvre hardly foresaw a fictional wave of zombies conquering the streets, it is still noteworthy that *The Walking Dead*, to some extent, visualizes a well-established image of an urban dystopia.

To put it in other words, the urban dystopia presented in the series might suggest a critique of Western civilization. It stands out in a stark contrast to the life the protagonists have on the countryside. While they live at the prison, and in particular in WD401, the characters and especially Rick promote a rural lifestyle by being a farmer. Hershel describes Rick accordingly: "But we do have to find you a good pair of overalls. You need to look the part. A little piece of weed out the corner of your mouth. Maybe a bigger ass" (12:00). They have turned the prison in to an encaged farm, where they have pigs, fields and horses to tend and keep. The characters are, though not for long, safe and prospering, with romances and friendships blossoming up, children playing outside and people having a sense of purpose. In spite of the missing happy ending of this farming plot, this way of living was put in a positive light in the show. The show devotes time to portraying a community that is actually seen as positive, which is not something commonly seen in *The Walking Dead* universe. One could argue that the rural lifestyle is idealized as something positive and sustainable.

Another aspect of modernity is mocked through the town Woodbury. This is where the antagonist the Governor lives, and his leadership and community can to some extent be seen as a satire of modern civilization in the West, but also be a portrayal of a ruthless dictator. The inhabitants of Woodbury have been sheltered from most of the brutality and horror the apocalypse brought with it, and much of this is due to the Governor for handling

things. However, what he tells the people and what he does are two very different things, which cause the inhabitants to be ignorant of the realities in their postapocalyptic universe. The Governor does not let the inhabitants why Rick's group entered Woodbury (which they did to save two group members kidnapped by the Governor), but simply states that "I am afraid of terrorists who want what we have" (38:22, WD308). In other words, the Governor, like a dictator, has full control over the inhabitants' knowledge and awareness, and due to his falsehood and lies (and his protection of them), the inhabitants place trust in their leader. The manner in which these inhabitants are left unaware and ignorant of their surroundings might reflect the power of mass-propaganda and the fears of totalitarian regimes. The Governor is very aware of the power of how things are perceived, and uses this to his advantage. Another interesting thing is that the Governor uses the term "terrorists". Just as mentioned in 3.2.1, the show presents yet another link with terrorism. For the Woodbury inhabitants, Rick's group becomes the intruders and terrorists. Like there are multiple Others to Rick's group, the protagonists are also Others to Woodbury.

Victoria Nelson describes zombies by saying that "mobs don't think" (155). This is demonstrated in *The Walking Dead* with every zombie herd that marches forwards, but also through the civilization at Woodbury following the Governor's lead. Some scenes in particular invite this reading, and the cliffhanger of the midseason finale WD308 and the following midseason premiere WD309 are good examples. In these scenes, the Governor has put two brothers, the characters Daryl and Merle, up against each other in an arena, and the inhabitants of Woodbury seem as eager to see death, flesh and blood as the zombies. The opening of WD309 is constructed accordingly: The episode opens with a very long shot presenting the crowd in Woodbury circling Daryl and Merle in an arena (0:03). The crowd seems agitated with raised fists punching the air while the audio covers people shouting "kill 'em". The next shot is an extreme close up of the Governor's eyes, nose and lips. He has a grimace on his face and one eye is covered with a cotton eye patch colored by blood. The next shot begins with three women who are restless and screaming agitatedly, until the dolly includes Merle in a close up. The camera continues to move and puts Daryl in the focal point in an extreme close up, along with the audio of ragged breathing. The three women are still moving in the background of the shot, out of focus. The Governor interrupts the frame and the camera zooms out to get a medium close up of him circling the brothers. The fourth shot is a very long shot again; giving an overview of the crowd that has assembled in the arena. The next shot is a close up of Merle and a medium close up of Daryl, which is soon followed

by a reversed angle shot, presenting Daryl in a close up and having more distance to Merle. All the while the audio gives the sound of a bustling crowd shouting their disapproval of the two brothers.

The Governor is free to move as he pleases, and he circles the brothers, which makes it seem as though he is targeting them. The shots of Merle and Daryl have similarities, which gives the impression that the two of them are in the same situation. They are both unmoving in their shots, opposed to the moving Governor, and the frantic crowd. At one point, the Governor gets his men to bring walkers into the arena, and they are also positioned in a circle around the brothers. At this point, the camera gives another overview shot as the one mentioned earlier, and they look strikingly similar: the brothers are still pitted against each other and surrounded by a crowd. This is followed by shots where it is difficult to distinguish the members of the crowd from the zombies. The dead and living alike raise their hands to the brothers, wait in anticipation to see blood spill and have no care for the violence they are causing. The living characters of Woodbury are not unsympathetic, since Merle and Daryl are portrayed to them as villains. The camera also presents the Governor with a halo of light at one point, while delivering the line: "It's not up to me anymore. The people have spoken" (00:45). This could perhaps suggest that the camera communicates the crowd's view of the Governor as a savior who gives them what they want, while simultaneously alluding to Pontius Pilatus who washed his hands free of guilt in the bible.

Those watching this scene know that the Governor is feeding the mass with lies; he is brainwashing them. However, the construction of this scene makes it difficult to separate man from zombie visually, and presents both people and zombies lusting for destruction side-by-side, which accentuates the reading of *The Walking Dead* as an urban dystopia. By living in a civilization like this you will be falsely informed and end up acting according to the will of others, like a puppet on a string. Just like Nelson argues how "Mobs don't think" (155), *The Walking Dead* presents zombie herds and a human mob that appear equally brainless. The living characters of Woodbury are not continuously constructed as unsympathetic, but here they have a lust for violence and blood, since Merle and Daryl are presented to them as being villains. All of this is due to the Governor who knows how to sway the masses with eloquent words and half-truths, in one way demonstrating how dangerous totalitarian states can be as well as how important freedom of the press is. The audience, on the other hand, is given an intimate view of Merle and Daryl and sees the mass of people as antagonists.

Though the audience might see the inhabitants of Woodbury as bloodthirsty as the zombies in this scene, the audience is watching a very violent show themselves. How big is the difference between the Woodbury inhabitants who are cheering for violence in this scene and the audience that tunes in to watch *The Walking Dead*, one of the most violent shows currently on television? Violence in film and television has been thoroughly discussed, and in particular concerning the possible detrimental effect violence may have on vulnerable viewers, like L. Andrew Cooper does in *Gothic Realities*. However, what is interesting about the violence in *The Walking Dead* is that it connects, in scenes like the one in WD309, the concept of human violence to that of civilization. Robert W. Sussman challenges the concept: “man is wolf to man” in *War, Peace and Human Nature* and proposes that violence and warfare are not biologically caused, but indeed a cultural phenomenon (109). *The Walking Dead* clearly depicts graphic violence towards human and nonhuman animals, however, it is interesting to note that the civilization in Woodbury is the only point at which violence is embedded as entertainment for the characters. Only in Woodbury’s culture is violence deemed as suitable for entertainment, opposed to the viewers who on a weekly basis accepts violence as entertainment.

The satirical element of this scene is that the Woodbury inhabitants are normal, nice people, as the show presents them both prior to and after this scene. Their political leader can twist and turn their understanding of reality as he pleases, which causes anticipated reactions within the masses. They have presumably chosen the Governor as their leader, at least it is presented that they did so in WD303, and his policies allow the crowd to look away from the unpleasantness of the postapocalyptic universe. The crowd chooses to ignore the implausibility of the Governor’s collection of military vehicles, for one thing, and they choose to believe his fabricated stories. They are sheltered from the reality outside of Woodbury, which could demonstrate how Western countries also are sheltered from the reality of various events. When the West contribute to “keep peace”, they send in soldiers, armies and guns. How much of the reality of these events that actually get back to the majority of the Western population is not the question here, but *The Walking Dead* can be interpreted to suggest that, as history has taught us, political leaders have tremendous power to shape the masses as they please, due to restrictions of information, media coverage and possible mass-propaganda.

3.3.2 Consumerism

One of the most striking images in *The Walking Dead* is that of a mass of zombies relentlessly striving forward, paving their way through deserted woods, streets, and gardens, pushing through fences and breaking through walls, as if nothing could stop them from getting what they want. The numerous shots of this hungry and constantly moving crowd might be interpreted allegorically as an image of how mankind has “progressed” or perhaps one should rather say regressed by constantly overstepping and exploiting nature. In her discussion of fantastical narratives, Christine Brooke-Rose emphasized that the fiction of the twentieth century reflected man’s crisis, and one of the elements of man’s crisis was that “the very notion of progress is now untenable” (7). I would like to argue that the drive for progress is just as untenable in the twenty-first century, and that this crisis also is present in fantastical fiction of this century, namely in *The Walking Dead*. The zombie advances in every episode; if it sees anything it wants, that being a coyote, horse or a character, it will unerringly move towards it and try to seize it. There are some scenes that invite to view this advancing zombie as a reflection of the majority in Western population, and two of them are in and WD401. Here, this understanding of progress and the concept of striding forwards will be the foundation for the analysis.

Due to the many deaths of living people, the walkers are the largest group the show, while the living constitutes a minority. Furthermore, because the zombies are portrayed as representing the diversity of a typical Western society, one could see them as representing not the Other but the Western majority population. In WD102, when Rick first encounters the group in Atlanta, he unknowingly leads the zombies to a shopping mall where the survivors have gathered (9:20). The previous episode ends with Rick riding straight into a flock of zombies, and though he managed to escape them, he ended up locking himself as well as his rescuers inside the mall. The mass of zombies followed him there, and Rick sees them for the first time when the others bring him into the mall. This sequence starts with a medium long shot that turns into a big close up of Rick. A point of view shot presents the group’s view of the entrance through a handheld camera’s slight pan, which shows a numerous amount of zombies stand outside the glass doors (10:08). There are two shots of them: the first has some distance to the door and portrays the zombies in a medium shot, but the next frame depicts them nearer in a close up. This close up shows a zombie holding a huge rock in his hands while smashing it to break the glass doors. The next shot presents the characters seeing this

and running inwards in the mall, while the audio gives Andrea's whispered cry of "oh God" (10:15). The camera then presents a reverse angle shot, another close up that tilts to show the zombies face and his hands holding a large rock. The glass doors are slowly giving in. The audio covers the zombies' growls, hammering and the characters' conversation.

It seems significant that this is one of the first times in the series that Rick and the others are brought face-to-face with a huge horde of zombies. Not only does the handheld camera add a level of unsteadiness to the shots, but the way in which they are shot with increasing proximity suggests that the nearer a zombie is the more danger it puts you in. The characters move back as the zombies try to get closer. Distance is key, and this is enhanced through the construction, especially through the increased zombie snarls when the shots of them are proximate. When the audience sees them piling up against the mall, one can easily be reminded of how the crowds tend to behave on Black Monday, with crazy shoppers rushing past and trampling on whoever that stand in their way, just for the sake of getting the best deals. The image of the zombies trying to get to the living "goods" inside the mall is both funny and starkly ironic. Surely, the survivors (and we, as viewers) can see that there is parallel between the shoppers and the zombies? As Victoria Nelson has pointed out, when discussing Kirkman's comic books, "the zombies are the doubles of the survivors' pre-apocalyptic selves, all those shambling human hordes who enjoyed the consumer abundance of bygone days" (156).

The Walking Dead alludes strongly to earlier horror films in this scene, and in particular to George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. Romero is in many ways the founder of the modern zombie, and Kyle W. Bishop notes that most critics discussing Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* see the film as an "overt criticism of contemporary consumer culture" (130). Not only has *The Walking Dead* developed Romero's zombie, but one could also argue that the show epitomizes the same criticism of contemporary culture. Romero's film has most of its action happening inside a mall, like in WD102 mentioned above, and thus deliberately draws the audience's attention towards consumerism and links it to the zombie (ibid.). Bishop maintains that the "Americans in the 1970s are the true zombies, slaves to the master of consumerism, mindlessly migrating to stores and shopping malls for the almost instinctual consumption of goods" (ibid.). I would argue that *The Walking Dead* builds on Romero's allegory by using the mall as a setting in several episodes, depicting a Romero-like zombie and presenting a limitless pool of resources.

The mall is also a setting in WD401, and though it does not involve zombies on the outside breaking in, it involves zombies on the roof falling down into the mall. The opening of the fourth season is spectacular with its zombies, showing one zombie hanging by its intestines after falling through the roof. However, once the zombies have fallen through the roof, they act similarly to the frantic shoppers on Black Monday, running after what they want and seizing it when possible. This is demonstrated with the death of the character Zack (28:38). Before he dies, however, the mall scenes portray the characters moving about as regular shoppers, more or less, gathering supplies much like the Western consumer would do (22:50). The show ran its fifth season this winter, and the characters still seem to find supplies for transport, medical purposes and canned food. The show demonstrates that the characters still spend nature's resources, which appear to be unlimited. This irony, that the show both promotes and ignores environmental awareness through its plot, gives a bitter tinge. As a consequence, *The Walking Dead* is very far from promoting a return to nature. While the show may be interpreted as critiquing the typical lifestyle of the Western majority living in cities, its main characters can hardly be said to promote environmental responsibility, as they continuously keep finding ways to act as the contemporary consumer, as WD401 demonstrates.

Does *The Walking Dead* suggest that Western civilization is killing itself by letting people behave as beasts, as if satisfying one's material hunger was more important than using one's brains? It has already been established that the zombies in the show have limited brain activity, and by positioning them in malls and depicting their acts as similar to acts in contemporary Western countries, the representation does not seem too far-fetched. This additionally links the show to the horror classic *Dawn of the Dead*, whose consumerist interpretation is well known and established in criticism. It would be strange not to acknowledge the show's obvious critique of Western consumerism. However, one must also note that the show hardly takes any steps towards illustrating a more sustainable way of life. While pointing a finger at consumerism and portraying consumers as monsters in this fictional universe, the heroes are also consumers, not to mention the audience.

3.3.3 Eating and Cannibalism

One factor that unmistakably is demonstrated in the show is that of devouring. The zombies eat everything that lives, and as they are former living human beings it becomes an act of

cannibalism when they eat people. Furthermore, the show also presents us with iconic images of zombies eating animals, and the very first of these images will be discussed here. In WD101, Rick escapes a zombie herd since the zombies become preoccupied with eating his horse. This sequence is shot with a handheld camera, and shows the horse falling down, being overpowered and eaten by the horde (61:45-61:57). The horse does not stand a chance. The battle is over in a few seconds, and the audio of the struggling animal soon fades away. The last shot of the horse shows it lying still (61:56). By using a very short shot length, a handheld camera, close up shots and much camera movement, this sequence stands out against others in the episode, even in this scene. The constant movement of the camera, both tilting and panning, gives the audience the impression that this is a frantic part of the episode where the adrenaline is high from stress and fear. One point of view shot is particularly important, as it tries to follow the horse's movements without completely succeeding. The viewers see this from Rick's perspective and watch in horror as the horse dies, constructed thus to make the viewer transfer their emotions to the character Rick.

These hurried shots with constant camera movement are brutally contrasted by the following shots of a steady camera, which inevitably gives this sequence emphasis. Therefore, what they depict is also of importance. This is the first time in the show that the audience is confronted with the zombies' devouring of living things, and for some viewers these shots might reflect the increasing consumption of meat in today's society. The idea that our eating habits are unsustainable is well established in the West, and *The Walking Dead*, consciously or not, addresses these issues. Depicting the zombie devouring everything that lives apart from other zombies resembles Western man who, alike the zombie, eats everything but its peers. There exists an anxiety that the consumption of meat will prove too costly to maintain, which is apparent through the increased number of vegetarians and vegans in today's Western society.

This fear is also portrayed in WD201 when Carl is accidentally shot. Shane, Rick and Carl are walking in a forest when they stumble upon a deer (57:05–59:25). The men see the deer as a source of food, but Carl does the opposite: the beauty of living creatures fascinates the young boy. This scene opens with an overview of the three of them walking, depicted in a long shot that changes into a medium shot as they approach. As the audio signals a twig that breaks, Rick motions them to stop. He spots some movement and the camera changes to a point of view shot, tracing the deer's movement. There are several point of view shots and reverse angle shot at this point, and little audio until a mesmerizing piece starts when Carl's

face is in a close up. He approaches the deer steadily, and the camera tracks his ascent from the deer's and his own perspective, as well as it supplies with big close ups of Rick and the deer, and close ups of Shane. The adult characters seem astonished by Carl's approach to the animal, but allow him to move closer to the deer, something which is accompanied with wondrous music. Carl is smiling as he slowly approaches the animal, and the scene makes it appear as the two of them are looking directly into each other's eyes. The music changes abruptly as the audio presents a loud gunshot, which is followed by ominous and building tones (59:10). A sudden shift in the frames is also present, from being big close ups to medium long shots at a reverse angle from the side. The deer and Carl both fall down, presenting them as being shot simultaneously by the same bullet.

Not only does this scene's constituents, the characters, the plot, the frames and the music, emphasize that nature is beautiful and deserving of careful preservation, but the narrative of a child and an animal getting shot by the same bullet suggests that killing animals may also kill the future. Children are often seen as representatives of future generations, and this scene is one that demonstrates an anxiety for our future survival due to the way the characters treat other species. Gerry Canavan discusses how *The Walking Dead* presents an anxiety of "reproductive futurity" (444), and when this scene is interpreted as demonstrated above, it can add to Canavan's argument. The show repeatedly deals with the loss of children, which in turn can symbolize the loss of future. It must not, however, be forgotten that Carl's gunshot wound also leads Rick's group to the farm, which is the setting for season two. This scene is also important for narrative building and a nice break from the recurring zombie gore. By adding scenes like this the show creates variation as well as driving the plot forwards, in addition to this being one of few scenes that centers on nature's beauty.

On the other hand, WD206 presents a quite different attitude towards animals when Carl states: "Everything is food for something else" (00:37). This sober attitude towards life suggests that some characters are starting to accept the reversed hierarchy that the zombie establishes in the fictional universe. In the same episode, we are made to witness the character named Patricia breaking the legs of two hens (1:20). She then puts them in a bag and brings them towards the barn, where Hershel keeps his reanimated friends and family. She enters the barn and feeds the hens to the zombies. Apparently it was not enough to provide them with dead meat, the zombies must kill to consume, but the hens should not be able to escape either. This act demonstrates that the food chain still remains powerful in the fiction, and that the characters will sacrifice other animals to prevent being eaten themselves.

Zombies eat people continuously throughout the show, which is what makes them monstrous. If the zombies are seen to represent the West, this adds to the argument that the West is currently exterminating itself through its mass consumption. However, the zombie's lust for human flesh also includes the concept of cannibalism, which is further pursued in other episodes. One of the most remarkable scenes where this comes up is in WD416, when a hostile group attacks Rick, Michonne and Carl. With help from Daryl, Rick and the others win over the antagonists, but in order to win, Rick bites flesh of one antagonist (12:55). This puts the topic of undisguised cannibalism on the table, though the human lookalike zombie has actualized it throughout. As formerly mentioned, this act is significant in establishing Rick's deteriorating morality: that he is becoming just as savage as the walking dead. Furthermore, in this scene man is doing what the zombie does, making the boundaries between man and zombie unstable. The Woodbury inhabitants in WD309 also demonstrated this, as they were indistinguishable visually (and almost behaviorally) from walkers. The difficulty in distinguishing between man and zombie also resonates with the reading of *The Walking Dead* as a critique of the West, wherein the zombie represents a modern consumer. If they look the same and act the same, how important could other differences between them be?

4 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate whether the zombies in *The Walking Dead* “represent and address anxieties of its time”, which is what fictional monsters do according to Levina and Bui (1). This has led to an interpretation of the story and zombies as the creators of the television series have constructed them. The thesis has attempted to read *The Walking Dead* allegorically by focusing primarily on key scenes and episodes in the series. The method has been to analyze the filmic features of television narration, such as angles, lighting, shots, audio and camera movement, that convey meaning co-dependently and enable an interpretation of *The Walking Dead* as it is presented.

According to how Robin Wood as well as Levina and Bui have understood the Other, or the monster, as a return of something repressed, this thesis has demonstrated that the zombie can be seen as a repressed Other outside of the self, but also fears and anxieties that are repressed within ourselves. This led to a tripartite thesis, where *The Walking Dead* and zombies firstly were connected to themes of death as well as death personified. Secondly, the concept of the Other was elaborated on and argued to represent terrorists, warfare, threats and the self. A figure of the Other is thus seen as being presented as a monster, as another group, within the group, and finally within the individual self. The beastly Other lurks, in other words, both inside and outside the protagonists. Thirdly, the thesis turned to the zombie as representations of the West, by finding links inherent in *The Walking Dead* between zombies and man.

The Walking Dead is a show that wishes to entertain its audience, which is how its creators earn their living. And due to something in our contemporary society, *The Walking Dead* has become massively popular and suits Berry’s definition of high concepts (212). However, this thesis has pointed out that the show contributes with more than entertainment: it can also be seen to play on, and maybe even criticize, widespread fears in Western society, like the fear of death and possible extinction of mankind. The interpretation has shown that death is constructed as something to be afraid of, but at the same time something indefinable, dangerous and sad. Additionally, there are elements of fascination and disgust connected to death’s personification, which is expressed through the characters’ approach to the zombie, but which also must be seen as true for the audience watching *The Walking Dead* as well.

On the one hand, the thesis has established how the show sparingly advocates for the zombie, but at the same time can give representations of fears like xenophobia or fear of the Other. Victoria Nelson has argued that there is a link between *The Walking Dead* and the events dealing with 9/11 (156–157), but this thesis has shown that there is more to the zombie than that. As Kyle W. Bishop states that the comics deal with a “potential ‘monstroization’ of humanity” (74), so can the show be seen to equate between the living and the dead. Furthermore, making the zombies and the characters close to indistinguishable, at least in some scenes, invites to read the zombies as ourselves. Thus, the show can offer critiques of a Western way of life and how its own audience is acting, which is accentuated by playing on horror tropes that already are linked to consumerism. Seen from yet another perspective, the show can satirize our unsustainable eating habits. At the same time, one should not view the show too seriously, but keep in mind that it is created for entertainment. The representations of fears in contemporary Western societies go hand in hand with a fascination of the macabre and a dramatic narrative.

This thesis fills a gap in existing criticism on *The Walking Dead* television series. Furthermore, it also interprets the show in a manner not yet applied to the television series, a method that has acknowledged the use of narrative devices available to the medium and how these contribute to shape the viewers’ interpretation of the show. However, the most fascinating thing in this thesis is not new or modern at all; Death has been given human form and taken part in human culture since the 1400s (Appleford 87). “Death is death”, as Rick so eloquently phrases it in WD208 (31:31), and we cannot fully understand what it means to die until we die. By then it will be difficult to say anything about it, at least the zombies find it so. As a result, we speculate about the concept of death and make up stories about it. Some stories that ease and others that disturb. I, for one, appreciate the disturbing stories, and as this thesis has pointed out: there are things to learn about death and our contemporary even in a sellable concept like this massively popular television series.

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