

The Walking Dead: A Communitarian Study

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Resumen

El presente artículo aplica teorías comunitarias post-fenomenológicas a la serie de AMT *The Walking Dead* (2010-),¹ con referencias ocasionales a la novela gráfica original escrita por Robert Kirkman (2003-) y a las dos webseries dirigidas por Greg Nicotero en 2011 y 2012. Siguiendo los presupuestos teóricos de Jean-Luc Nancy y Maurice Blanchot, entre otros críticos, el presente ensayo pretende conectar la metáfora zombi con nociones comunitarias. El punto de partida es el contraste entre comunidades operativas —que buscan la inmanencia de la comunión de sus miembros integrantes y se sustancian en los tropos esencialistas de la nación, la sangre y la raza— y comunidades inoperativas —que rechazan la inmanencia esencialista y se caracterizan por la *trans-inmanencia*, una condición ontológica que implica una conexión con algo o alguien externo a nosotros, pero al mismo tiempo parte constituyente de nuestro ser. Aspectos como el secreto blanchotiano, la auto-inmunidad, la auto-destrucción o el contagio son centrales para entender el vínculo entre la metáfora zombi y la teoría comunitaria. *The Walking Dead* recrea un diálogo comunitario que constantemente revisa y problematiza la alteridad absoluta de Lévinas, que demuestra ser altamente ilustrativa en términos comunitarios.

Palabras clave: *Walking Dead*, metáfora zombi, *trans-inmanencia*, comunidad, auto-inmunidad, contagio.

Summary

The present article applies post-phenomenological communitarian theory to the 2010 AMT TV series *The Walking Dead*², with occasional references to the original comic book written by Robert Kirkman (2003-ongoing) and the two webseries directed by Greg Nicotero in 2011 and 2012. Following the theoretical tenets of Jean-Luc Nancy and

¹ Este artículo fue redactado al concluir la tercera temporada de la serie.

² This article was written at the end of Season 3.

Maurice Blanchot, among other critics, this essay aims to connect the zombie metaphor with communitarian notions. The starting point is the contrast between operative communities that crave for the immanence of a shared communion and substantiate themselves in the essentialist tropes of nation, blood, and/or race, and inoperative communities that reject communal and essential immanence and are characterized by *transimmanence*, an ontological condition of being related to something or someone other than but also part of ourselves. Aspects like the Blanchotian secret, auto-immunity, self-destruction, or contagion are central to understanding the link between the zombie metaphor and communitarian theory. *The Walking Dead* recreates a communitarian dialogue that constantly revises and problematizes Lévinas' absolute alterity and proves highly illustrative in communitarian terms.

Keywords: *Walking Dead*, zombie metaphor, *transimmanence*, community, auto-immunity, contagion.

Communitarian theory and the zombie metaphor

The connection of the zombie metaphor and present-day communitarian revisions is aptly reflected in Jack Larson's painting "Zombie Art", hidden secretly in mobile phones to suggest that modern technology produces an enslaved population. It thus universally extends and modernizes the zombie metaphor within a contemporary context with a clear indication of what Henry Giroux calls "the twenty-first century zombies [who] no longer emerge from the grave" but "now inhabit" a culture of well-being (2011: 2). As Jean-Luc Nancy clarifies in "The Confronted Community", there has been an ardent philosophical debate about community since the 1980s which still deserves close attention to prevent it from falling into obscurity (2003a: 27). With an unprecedented force nowadays, the zombie metaphor provides a potent locus from which to reconsider communitarian tenets³. Together with Maurice Blanchot—and George Bataille as a third participant *in absentia*—, Nancy was responsible for generating a communitarian debate in the early 80's. More recently, he has coined the term "singular plurality" (2000) to further problematize the notion of community. For Nancy there is no such thing as an individual, an identity, or oneness. Community for Nancy is necessarily being-with and is constituted by relation to the other ("you-shares-me"). He recomposes Heidegger's *Being and Time* to

³ See Holmes (2009), Ferrero and Roas (2011: 6), and Martínez and Barraycoa (2012: 110).

make singular plurality (or “being-with”) match the shift from Heideggarean *dasein* to *mitsein* (being-with).

Joseph Hillis Miller (2005: 86-7) offers a clarifying contrast of the two types of communities that will be focal in the present study. Miller’s “commonsense” model—which I will call “organic” or “operative” community—presupposes pre-existing, self-enclosed individuals or subjectivities who, through intersubjective communication, create a contract, society or community based on myths and shaped by ideological state apparatuses, that is, “a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (Althusser, 1971: 143). By contrast, in Nancy’s and Blanchot’s models, there are no individualities but singularities. Each singularity “is not a self-enclosed subjectivity ... [It] is exposed, at its limit, to a limitless or abyssal outside that it shares with the other singularities, from the beginning, by their common mortality” (Miller, 2005: 91). In order to overcome absolute immanence, the inoperative community needs a relation among its members beyond “inconsequential atomism” or “individualism”, what Nancy calls *clinamen* (1991: 3-4; 2008: 53). He further clarifies the aim of his community, which is not fusion or communion but rather “being-together”, “being-in-common” or the Heideggerian “being-with” (2003b: 31). Blanchot clarifies that the dissolution of the constituent members of the community into unity would lead to the annulment of the very community (1988: 8). Derrida, in turn, expresses dislike for the connotations of fusion and identification implied by the word “community” (Caputo, 1997: 107) and, using Jan Patocka’s terminology, he speaks about “demonic rapture” and “orgiastic sacred” to refer to the community’s fervor for fusion, which implies “the removal of responsibility, the loss of the sense of consciousness” (Caputo, 1997: 1), a definition very aptly applied to the zombie hordes that populate *The Walking Dead*, who are an extreme version of Blanchot’s spontaneous crowd (1988: 33), a kind of collectivity that produces what Roberto Esposito describes in Bataillean terms as a “violent loss of borders”, a “spasm in the continuity of the subject” (2010: 7).

Nancy’s alternative model implies then embracing alterity beyond immanence. He coins the term *transimmanence* (1998: 55) to refer to our ontological condition of being related to something or someone other than but ultimately part of ourselves. With his theorisation, Nancy dismantles Emmanuel Lévinas’ notion of absolute alterity (1979: 33) in Lévinas’ now seminal *Totality and Infinity*. As clarified by Christopher Watkin, “this focus on Alterity brought with it a regime under which the cardinal sin was to ‘totalize’ the

other, to speak on behalf of the other in a reductive, essentializing way that made it the other *of the same*" (2007: 50). Indeed, Lévinas speaks of the relationship between the same and the other as radical heterogeneity (1979: 36), as an ontological scission that allows a non-allergic relation of the same with the other (1979: 305). Ignaas Devisch explains the perception of the Other in Lévinasian terms: "The Other is that entity that always escapes categorization, and every attempt to assimilate him or her as a we. It is precisely in his radical being-other than myself that the Other breaks free of the reductionist totality implied in every we" (2013: 35). Even though Lévinas' position was revised in his later work *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence* (1981)—mainly after Derrida's response in his essay "Violence and Metaphysics" (1964)—the discourse of absolute alterity has remained prevalent in Western thought. It will be Nancy who challenges this perception with his notion of singular plurality so that, as clarified by Devisch, "[t]he primal ontological conditions of our existence are no longer conceived as the One, the Other, or the We, but as 'with', as 'singular plurality', or sharing" (2007: 175). In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy argues in favour of a plurality of a *we* without making the *we* a singular identity, but rather he speaks of a "being-with" as a mutual exposure to one another that preserves the freedom of the *I*.

The zombie metaphor provides the locus from which to explore the two types of communities theorized above, which Robert Kirkman dissects in his comic book series *The Walking Dead* and in the ATM TV series, thus deconstructing the radical parameters of organic communities and exploring Nancy's notion of *transimmanence* in the thin line that separates humans from zombies. By its nature, the zombie metaphor resists Lévinas' absolute other and forces to reconsider Manichean notions of sameness and alterity. In spite of the general criticism of the zombie as easily reduced to a social metaphor (Wallin, 2012: 254), it remains unquestionable that, as stated by Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, its ubiquity suggests the zombie's cultural currency⁴. The zombie becomes the perfect receptacle to explore Nancy's *transimmanence*. In contrast to Franco Moretti's dialectic of fear (1988)—which locates antagonism and horror in an external monster—the zombie, as reinvented by George Romero in 1968, is located *within* society. Its liminal position as connecting sameness and otherness is summarized by Lauro and Embry: "the zombie, by its very definition, is anticatharsis, antiresolution: it proposes no third term reconciling the subject/object split, the lacuna between life and death. The zombie is

⁴ Lauro and Embry (2008: 86); Webb and Bynand (2008: 83).

opposition held irrevocably in tension” (2008: 94)⁵. More specifically, and since *The Walking Dead* is a local application of the zombie metaphor to the U.S., some critics have enhanced its adaptability to this nation’s political and cultural panorama. Giroux uses the zombie metaphor to explore the political and pedagogical conditions that have produced a growing culture of sadism, cruelty, disposability, and death in America. He speaks of the “hyper-dead” as “an apt metaphor for a new kind of authoritarianism that has a grip on contemporary politics in the United States” (2011: 2), an idea that will be particularly useful for the analysis of Woodbury⁶. All these communitarian models are never clear-cut modalities in *The Walking Dead*, and this contributes to reinforce Nancy’s *transimmanence* and to question traditional notions of the individual and the nation.

“You cozy in there?”: Singular plurality and auto-immunity in Season 1

The zombie metaphor provides a potent realm from which to explore Nancy’s concept of singular plurality in its rejection of absolute alterity. The ontology of the zombie entails *transimmanence*: a corporeal presence, the residue of the human carcass that used to contain the now lost humanity, but with alterity taking over as all the previous memories have been removed. The TV series faithfully explores the notion of *transimmanence*, since the corporeal angle is inherent to the zombie motif (mainly through the idea of contagion), especially when in Season 2 we discover that all humans are infected and, therefore, the virus of alterity runs in their blood as a clear example of singular plurality. The result of the zombie contagion is that human bodies become strangers to us. As Nancy clarifies, “bodies are existence, the very act of ex-istence, being” (2008: 19) with an obvious exposition to our own death (1991: 66).

In Season 1 Sheriff’s deputy Rick Grimes epitomizes the singularity who is ready to abandon his individuality to expose himself to alterity and thus partake of Nancy’s inoperative community. Rick’s direct confrontation with finitude results from a near-death experience, a coma from which he awakens in a seemingly abandoned hospital. One of his first visions is a dead woman in a pool of blood, which is followed by the confrontation with rows of rotten bodies in body bags. While in the comic version Rick puts on his uniform, in the TV series his corporeity is enhanced since he keeps the hospital gown, which reveals his half-naked and lacerated body, still displaying the wound that left him unconscious. Episode 1 already offers the change in Rick from absolute alterity to singular

⁵ The human-zombie tension is the focus of Bloom (2007) and Moreman and Rushton (2011).

⁶ Using Hannah Arendt’s totalitarian theories, Jorge Martínez Lucena and Javier Barrycoa Martínez (2012) speak of the connection of the zombie metaphor and U.S. totalitarianism.

plurality. At the beginning of the episode he encounters a mutilated zombie next to a bicycle, which he steals to escape from the zombie threat and to arrive home. After being rescued by Morgan Jones, who explains the zombie apocalypse to him and introduces the topic of contagion in the series, Rick experiences the *transimmanence* of the zombie through Morgan, who is unable to shoot his zombie wife in spite of knowing that she has now become a deadly threat. Rick is then ready to embrace alterity and goes back to the park where he previously encountered a deteriorated zombie, apologizes and kills her out of mercy.

Another extreme example of corporeity associated with *transimmanence* is found in 1x02. After being assisted by Glenn Rhee to escape from a tank in Atlanta, Rick and the rest of the group are trapped in a department store and surrounded by a horde of zombies. To reach a truck to escape, Rick and Glenn cover themselves in the blood and viscera of a dispatched walker so as to trick the zombies into thinking that they are part of the group. Prior to covering themselves with this body, they discover that the name of this walker was Wayne and “he was one of us”, a statement that is followed by a list of his ordinary preoccupations similar to those of human beings before the zombie apocalypse. In spite of the bluntness of the image, the metaphorical implication of this connection with singular plurality is very effective⁷.

However, this barbarous act starts suggesting a problem with the type of inoperative communities explored in the series: they emerge out of the extreme necessity of survival, not out of real desire to connect. The empathy with the zombie that used to be Wayne is temporary. The contact with the body does not involve appropriation or communion. It is the *between* theorized by Nancy, which entails

contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other. Contact is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection. (2000: 5).

Rick and Glenn are very tactful to protect themselves from the contagion of the zombie corpse and it is the mortal body of that monster that finally saves them. These two

⁷ A similar exploration of *transimmanence* is the story of the bicycle girl of Episode 1, which is developed in the webseries *Torn Apart* as a way to mark the subtle line that separates sameness from alterity.

characters step outside to occupy symbolically the position of the zombie-other. Rick and Glenn are able to successfully pass among the walkers, but this contact with alterity is temporary, just like the brief rainstorm that washes off the bodily cover and forces them to reveal their singularity as humans and to protect themselves by killing the zombies. This temporariness in inoperative communities (Blanchot, 1988: 54) is not only suggested between humans and zombies, but even among humans themselves. Attempts at singular pluralities are more evident at the beginning of the TV series, when there is still hope to connect with other human beings. However, as the series progresses and the survival instinct becomes more extreme, the zombies are no longer the primary threat, but other human groups. Then the initial, temporary, inoperative drive disappears and the traditional, saturated community becomes the norm. This evolution towards organicism and auto-immunity is parallel to Rick's evolution towards enclosure and immanence.

A much-discussed aspect in the series is that its post-apocalyptic atmosphere allows to question U.S. nationalism, which is consistently revised in order to explore alternative communitarian bonds. In the TV series there is a pervasive use of the U.S. flag as a symbol of a nation that is deconstructed. When Rick returns home, the national flag is at the entrance of his empty house, an ironic projection of the lack of shelter offered now by the country, which is presented as a destroyed nation. In 1x05 the U.S. flag in Dale's RV is inverted on the wall. The topic of terrorism is only suggested in the TV series while it becomes the leading theory in the two webseries⁸. In Episode 4 of *Torn Apart* one of the characters, Mike Palmer, confirms that it is "terrorism without using bombs". The covert participation of *The Walking Dead* in post 9-11 narratives is visually suggested in the opening of the second webseries, *Cold Storage*, where survivor Chase is portrayed on a rooftop in Atlanta with the U.S. flag and an apocalyptic skyline at the background that automatically bring to mind the images of 9-11. However, this theory is never tested in the series, thus contributing to the unsettling effect in the viewer. Regardless of the origin of this threat, what is unquestionable is the dilapidated and helpless image of the nation—"If there's any government left, any structure at all" (1x05). When Rick arrives in Atlanta, he finds the city looking like an abandoned war-zone. The clearest symbol of the lack of protection offered by the nation is the abandoned tank where Rick shelters from zombie hordes. The threat for the nation is no longer external but, in line with the zombie metaphor, it is located inside, just like the dead soldier in the tank that ends up attacking

⁸ As theorized by Bishop, the so-called "Zombie Renaissance" after America's 9/11 has undeniably "addressed the social and cultural anxieties stemming from recent terrorist attacks" (2010: 10). See also Labra (2012: 97), Graham (2011), Lowder (2011: x), or Petsko (2011: 108).

Rick. Sarcastically, a radio voice over exposes the emptiness of the protective national body: “Hey, you, dumbass. You in the tank. You cozy in there?” Rick turns into a parodied police force in extremis wearing his sheriff suit and its lost authority as an ocean of zombies swarms around the tank.

Paranoia becomes a central concern in the series, based on a clear-cut distinction between state forces as providing safety against external threats and those threats themselves. The indistinct character of *us* and *them* in the zombie post-apocalypse connects with Schmitt’s notion of “depolitization”, and the idea that it is no longer possible to identify the “enemy” as such—see Schmitt (2007: 26-27) and Hägglund (2008: 179)—an idea that suggests an internal conspiracy directed against the nation’s citizens. In 2x10 Shane’s flashback shows that police forces were killing humans (not zombies) with no apparent reason—in Season 2 we discover that all humankind is infected, but at this point it becomes clear that the government is no longer protective, an idea enhanced by the government’s encouragement to look for shelter in big cities, while they prove to be death traps⁹.

In connection with this symbolically emasculated nation, Season 1 explores Rick Grimes’ moral debate about his fidelity to the nation’s police force¹⁰. In spite of the evident collapse of the national government, he feels the need to still belong to that artificially constructed body politics. In the middle of an evident societal chaos, Rick sticks to his police officer uniform in a deluded attempt to preserve his control and feel safe. However, this vain attempt ironically contrasts with the almost intact preservation of the former Sheriff’s headquarters and its national flag flying in public display, an empty signifier in a collapsed society. The clearest contrast comes when he finds his fellow police officer, Leon Basset, now a zombie in police guise. Rick kills Leon and the viewer realizes that ideological state apparatuses are no longer safe; the body politics is as rotten as zombie corpses. Rick is overtly compared with Clint Eastwood in 1x02, an American icon of masculinity and legal order, which is openly parodied and questioned by Glenn.

In this panorama of national destruction, saturated communities are no longer sustainable and Nancy’s temporary alternative of singular plurality is explored. The trope of the walkie-talkie is pervasive in the series as a powerful symbol of human communication and *transimmanence*. In the tank episode of the pilot, in spite of Rick’s protection from the external threat of the zombies, the radio inside the tank allows his openness to the outside

⁹ This idea is highlighted in the comic version: “The government tried to herd everyone into the cities so we’d be easier to protect. All that did was put all the food in one place” (#2 p. 20).

¹⁰ In the comic version, Rick is more skeptical about the government and its ideological state apparatuses from an early stage (see his dialogue with Shane in #4 p. 4 and #6 p. 8).

and his forced trust in the voice of a stranger—more so when we later discover that Glenn is of Korean ascendance. The racial issue, which has been extensively discussed in *The Walking Dead* (Aristides Díaz, 2007: 163), becomes a central motif to enhance the unworked community that Rick constitutes with the newly-found group that rescues him from death. In this episode, communication and openness to alterity are the key to survival and the exit from the immanence of the nationalistic values represented by the deadly tank.

In Season 1, Merle Dixon epitomizes the virulent racist and perfect dictator of totalitarian, immanent communities who, in spite of the new deadly atmosphere, is still unable to overcome social prejudice. In attempting to assert his leadership over the group, he beats a black man, T-Dog, and ironically describes his dictatorship (“I’m the boss”) as democracy. His intolerance covers all possible minority groups: black and Hispanic men (“nigger”/“taco-bender”), straight (“sugar tits”) and lesbian women (“rug muncher”), and gay men (“pussy-ass noncom bitch”). It is Rick that clarifies the openness to alterity within this immanent group: “Things are different now. There are no niggers anymore, no dumb ass shit inbred white trash fools either, only dark meat and white meat. There’s us, and the dead. We survive this by pulling together, not apart”. The reference to “inbred” indicates the immanence that characterizes prejudiced organic societies, of which Merle is the perfect ambassador. And yet, Merle himself offers the key to *transimmanence* when he tells T-Dog: “Come on now. It wasn’t personal. It’s just that your kind and my kind ain’t meant to mix. That’s all. It doesn’t mean we can’t work together, parley, as long as there’s some kind of mutual gain involved”. Probably this is the key to the temporary cooperation of all the members.

In contrast with this temporary community, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention stands as a sharp contrast of extreme immanence and self-enclosure and an interesting metaphor for excessive auto-immunity that leads to self-destruction. Roberto Esposito (2002) develops the terms community and immunity dialectically. He draws a parallelism between a biological body and the collective body of the community. Like the human body—which protects the organism from illnesses by the incursion of a specific pathogen in order to generate antibodies—the survival of the community depends on the construction of self-protective boundaries and laws which create immunitarian violence in order to prevent external violence. This is the paradox of the community: its tendency to protect life by at times negating it. Derrida (2005) argues that self-protective mechanisms deployed by communities in order to secure the integrity of their defining narratives

necessarily imply a self-destructive force. In 1x05 Dr. Edwin Jenner is a clear example of complete self-closure out of protection from an external threat, and is shown in a biohazard protection suit. This protective unit initially represents Nancy's idea of *clinamen* as, after long consideration, Jenner finally but reluctantly allows Rick's group to enter the place. However, the idea of immanence is symbolically enhanced since the connection of singularities is not done externally, but internally, inside the protective walls of the CDC building.

Jenner epitomizes the immanent community and its obsession with contagion and auto-immunity. The self-enclosure of immanent communities is symbolically depicted in Jenner's complete isolation—his only communication is with a video camera, where he leaves diary entries, and with a robotic voice, Vi, which gives the impression of human communication, as when Rick's group think Vi is a person. This is a powerful metaphor and criticism to immanent communities and their disconnection from the outside world. Jenner momentarily opens up, breaking "every rule in the book" by letting them in "here", but he is excessively meticulous as regards contagion, as when he forces all the members to submit to a blood test as the price for admission. However, this openness is not really so, if we consider that Rick's group is part of Jenner's group after all (living Americans rather than zombies), or that, as we discover later on in the series, they are all infected and therefore there is no point in being excessively auto-immune.

Jenner's scientific discourse is openly contrasted with religion, as a way to bring forth the traditional antithesis science-religion, but also to prove that Jenner's scientific language is another organic, safe way to transfigure death (just like religion does), rather than the direct confrontation that Rick's group experienced with zombies outside the CDC building. In trying to explain the process that converts human beings into zombies, Jenner adopts a scientific discourse and concludes that it could be microbial, viral, parasitic, fungal, while Jacqui states that it could be the wrath of God. Both discourses are placed at the same level of organicism; they both transfigure the reality of death and provide some comfort with a suitable explanation. The connection of the CDC building's auto-immunity with self-destruction is made clear when Jenner specifies the goal of this unit: "We protected the public from very nasty stuff! Weaponized smallpox! Ebola strains that could wipe out half the country! Stuff you don't want getting out! Ever! In the event of a catastrophic power failure, in a terrorist attack, for example, H.I.T.s are deployed to prevent any organisms from getting out". He explains that in the event of an invasion, with a suggestion that the

zombie attack might be the result of terrorism, an explosion would destroy the building, the clearest indication that excessive auto-immunity might lead to self-destruction.

The totalitarianism of immanent communities is suggested when, even if the members of the community want to escape from self-enclosure, they cannot, because, as Jenner clarifies, openness is not something he controls; computers do. The members of the community become preys of their excessive self-protection. As a victim of his own saturated scientific jargon, and unable to confront the reality of death outside the CDC building, Jenner becomes the clearest victim of auto-immunity and sticks to self-destruction. He tells Rick a secret, with its Blanchotian undertones, which we later discover to be that all humans are infected, hence his conclusion that “there is no hope; there never was”, but at least he allows the group to abandon the building, thus proving that the control over immanence is ultimately human. Even in such an extreme case, Jenner embraces *transimmanence*, as, even though he chooses to stay inside the no-longer protective unit, he opens up to alterity, represented by Jacqui, the black woman who chooses to die with him. It is a way to face real death without the protective discourse of science or religion. These two antithetical discourses now hold hands, just like Jenner and Jacqui, white and black, opposite discourses that *touch* each other in Nancy’s understanding. The rest of the group manages to break free from the destructive immanence of the CDC building, although they need to use a grenade to blow out one of the windows, as an indication of the difficulty to break immanence and find a way out.

“Unbreaking the group:” From *Transimmanence* to Organicism in Season 2

Season 2 offers an interesting exploration of organic communities that eventually learn to step outside their immanence. The clearest example is Hershel Greene’s farm group. Even though his community opens up temporarily to welcome Rick’s crowd, Hershel clarifies: “We don’t normally take in strangers. I can’t have your people thinking this is permanent” (2x04). In 2x05 Hershel tells Rick: “I’ll control my people; you control yours”, with a suggestion that the two groups have separate norms and leaders. While Daryl Dixon is looking for Sophia in the forest, he has a hallucination and his brother Merle appears before him. As the epitome of the saturated racist and nationalistic figure, Merle offers the key for organic communities, in line with Ferdinand Tönnies’ theoretical rationale: they are immanent communities of blood (2001: 27), which is clarified when Merle encourages Daryl to neglect Rick’s group since “they ain’t your kin, your blood” (2x05).

This is the key to understanding Hershel's organicism. His communal immanence is explained by Nancy: this community "fuses the *egos* into an *Ego* or a higher *We*", by virtue of "some substance or subject—be these homeland, native soil or blood, nation, family, or mystical body" (1991: 15). Following Blanchot's motif of the secret that sets the foundation of the organic community (1988: 19)—a secret that is normally connected with the death of a member of the original group—at the end of Episode 5 Glenn discovers that Hershel's barn is full of zombies, Hershel's former family. In this case, Hershel's group proves to be an organic community which is not directly confronted with death, as the zombies are transfigured into Tönnies' organic community of blood. The clearest indication is Maggie's surprise with the confrontation of death, while Glenn and the rest of Rick's group are used to finding corpses out on the road. The projection of the family ties into the zombies inside the barn—another indication of immanence—prevents Hershel and his group from directly confronting death. Once again, as in Season 1, the scientific-medical discourse is used as a way of transfiguring death and making it more bearable for human beings inside organic communities. Hershel's theory throughout Season 2 is that the walkers are still humans who are ill. He uses the example of a paranoid schizophrenic and says that "we don't shoot sick people" (2x06) and overtly mentions other examples of contagion like AIDS (2x02).

According to Nancy, being-in-common and contagion should not be confused with fusion or immanence. Contagion is an "interruption" that "exposes singularity to its limit, which is to say, to other singularities" (1991: 60). In the series, the fear to contagion leads to self-protection and immanence. However, the TV series (more than the comic) questions contagion in the immanent sense and opens up to Nancy's reinterpretation. Jenner's and Hershel's temporary openness to Rick's group in spite of the potential contagion is a clear example of how all of them are singularities exposed at their limit, an act which necessarily implies risk and uncertainty. Singular beings, Nancy argues, communicate with one another by *compearance*, which is "a contact, it is a contagion: a touching, the transmission of a trembling at the edge of being, the communication of a passion that makes us fellows" (1991: 61). Nancy speaks of the *transimmanence* we find in Jenner and Hershel and not in the engulfing contagion carried out by the ontological totalitarianism of zombies. The latter would be an example of what Blanchot calls "a tendency towards a *communion*, even a fusion" of its members, in order to create the illusion of "a unity" or "supra-individuality" (1988: 6-7).

The debate between Rick and Hershel contributes to blur the line that separates sameness and alterity in zombies. Even though the series presents zombies as murderous, Episode 2x07 questions the Manichean perception of good-evil, living-dead, human-animal, and the series offers a momentary inversion of ontological positions. Although Hershel asked for respect for the zombies while Rick's group stayed in the farm, Shane screams that walkers are not human, and executes one of them while the rest of Rick's group form a firing line and execute the zombies as they emerge. Suddenly, to the spectators' eyes, Rick's group becomes as murderous as the zombies, and the latter are shown as victims of a cold-blood massacre. This animalization of the human group reaches a peak when, as the group calms down, the child Sophia, who had disappeared in the forest for 7 episodes, stumbles out of the barn, clearly now a walker. All of a sudden, spectators sympathize with Sophia's mother, who begins to sob uncontrollably, and with Hershel's task to offering shelter to his kin. In a highly poetic and delicate passage, Rick solemnly shoots Sophia in the head and the episode ends with a shot of the survivors standing before the bullet-torn walkers and Sophia's body. This is probably the clearest example of *transimmanence*, and alterity is revisited by means of defamiliarization.

However, this empathy with the zombies proves short-lived, as Episode 8 starts with Hershel's daughter Beth approaching her zombie mother, who tries to kill her daughter and thus proves Rick and his group's theory that zombies are not sick but murderous. The group recovers its humanity and it will be this now direct confrontation with death that leads Hershel and his group to *transimmanence*. Hershel abandons his transfigurative medical discourse, and clarifies his direct confrontation with death and, hence, his predisposition now to communitarian openness: "Death is death. It's always been there, whether it's from a heart attack, cancer, or a walker. What's the difference?" (2x08). Now he abandons his blind connection with blood ties and opens to the embrace of alterity represented by another community of "strangers". From now on, Rick's and Hershel's group join forces and stick together.

The cathartic scene of the zombie massacre in Episode 7 marks a change in the series. From this moment on, and particularly in Season 3, the zombies are no longer the main threat, but other human groups, as an allegorical way to emphasize that the zombie metaphor is no longer necessary to speak about organic communities, immanence and auto-immunity/self-destruction. In Episode 9 a new threat is introduced with two men who belong to a conflicting group. They are killed by Rick in self-defence, but this act unleashes a military confrontation between surviving groups that anticipates the central

enmity between Rick's and the Governor's groups in Season 3. In spite of the organicism towards which all the communities are going to tend as a surviving mechanism, Rick's group still proves its predisposition to *transimmanence*. During a confrontation of the two groups in town, the gunfire attracts a horde of walkers, who kill one of the injured attackers in the process; the remaining two attempt to escape. One of them, named Randall, tries to escape by jumping off the roof but he ends up impaling his leg on a fence. While his mate deserts him, Rick's group helps Randall.

However, what initially seems an act of *clinamen* eventually proves the evolution of Rick's community (now merged with Hershel's) towards an organic, saturated union. They torture Randall to get information from their enemy community and plan to execute him in an act of self-protection, an act which causes a moral debate. Blanchot's founding secret of organic communities hangs over the group when, after planning Randall's execution, a hardened Rick tells all of them: "you'll go hide your heads in your tents and try to forget that we're slaughtering a human being ... This group is broken" (2x11). Suddenly, another twist of ontological positions is offered when Dale, the only figure in the group who openly displays his humanity, says: "How are we any better than those people that we're so afraid of?" The loss of humanity in the group is mainly displayed in Rick when, in a statement full of sarcasm, he concludes that "shooting may be more humane". Although Rick momentarily recovers his ethical sense when his son Carl encourages him to kill Randall—thus recognizing the monstrification of the new generation—with Dale's death in Episode 11, the group's ethical sense dies too. There is still some hope when, during Dale's burial, they all agree that the group was broken according to Dale but that their way to honor him is "to unbreak it" (2x12). After a zombie attack to Hershel's farm that ends up with the destruction of the place and the dismemberment of the group, there is still some hope when all the survivors reunite in the spot where some food was left for Sophia when they thought she was alive. However, this apparently optimistic note is soon eclipsed by Rick's revelation of the Blanchotian secret, which is introduced in the finale of Season 1 and maintained all throughout Season 2: they are all infected. This revelation proves that what seemed to be an inoperative community is just a mirage. Rick issues a final warning: "This isn't a democracy anymore", thus asserting his position as leader of the group. This final episode ends with the image of the group unknowingly camped near a prison center, a symbolic image of their immanence after all in a series where spatial imagery cannot be underestimated.

“Within these walls”: Organic communities in Season 3

The predominant note of Season 3 is the survival instinct under extreme circumstances, which forces Rick’s group to immanence and self-protection rather than their previous *transimmanence*. The beginning of the episode shows Rick’s group as clearly animalized, looking desperately for food and not speaking among themselves. The clearest symbol for this immanence is the prison complex which, once appropriated, they call “home, sweet home. For the time being” (3x01). As was the case with the CDC building, the prison offers the group auto-immunity, paradoxically converting the prison cells into comfortable bedrooms and providing the new inmates with the security they could not find outside. Government forces are once again questioned in the series: the prisoners’ space offers protection while police forces have turned into zombies and thus into the enemy. This is clarified in Episode 2: “There’s no government, no hospitals, no police. It’s all gone”. The first episode opens with the exploration of immanence in Rick’s group. They discover a group of five surviving prisoners, but the two groups compromise to share the prison on the condition that they never interact. Rick’s group pledges to help the prisoners clear out their own cell block in exchange for half of the food remaining in the commissary’s storeroom. During this brief cooperation, the leader of the inmates disobeys Rick, who kills him.

However, even when Rick’s community has clearly evolved towards immanence and totalitarianism, the possibility of redemption and openness never disappears. In fact, in sharp contrast with Rick’s group, the town of Woodbury appears as the epitome of organicism and totalitarianism under the control of a dictator-like figure, known as the Governor. Woodbury epitomizes the self-enclosed, immanent community, a secure sanctuary with high walls and heavily armed guards, with plenty of supplies including water, food, and electricity. The Governor’s following words when introducing Woodbury to Andrea and Michonne summarize his sense of immanence and auto-immunity and Giroux’s “real” American values (2011: 3):

The real secret is what goes on within these walls. It’s about getting back to who we were. Who we really are. They’re just waiting to be saved. And people here have homes, medical care, kids go to school, adults have jobs to do. There’s a sense of purpose. We’re a community. With a lot of guns and ammunition. Never hurts. And really big walls. And men willing to risk everything to defend them. Compromise our safety, destroy our community, I’ll die before I’ll let that happen. (3x03)

Later in the series, Michonne clarifies the extreme immanence that characterizes Woodbury: “No one who comes here leaves ... This place is not what they say it is” (3x05). Michonne’s perception about the false appearance of the town is materialized in the Governor, who hides his extreme totalitarianism under the guise of democracy and communitarian well-being¹¹, but as early as Episode 3 we discover his sanguinary, dictatorial side. When the Governor is killing a guardsman, he mentions the iconic image of Uncle Sam, thus appropriating nationalistic values and the common national personification of the American government that came into use during the War of 1812. Indeed, the Woodbury town that he governs—hence, his title rather than his proper name, Philip—is a microcosm that apparently recreates American lifestyle and that he controls as a totalitarian leader rather than as the democratic figure that he brainwashes his people to believe. The Governor thus carries out an artificial and saturated recreation of U.S. lifestyle and self-protective militarism. His organic speech based on communitarian nostalgia is clearly portrayed in 3x05: “We’ve built a place we can call home. May be held together with duct tape and string, but it works. It’s ours”. The Governor imposes very strict rules for the town to preserve his command. When Michonne becomes a rebellious threat to the community, the Governor tells her: “You’ve broken the rules. And if I don’t do anything, I invite anarchy”. However, his corruption is clear when he attempts to recruit Michonne for the research team in exchange of keeping “a lid on your little outburst” (3x05).

Behind the appearance of civilization, the series’ deconstruction of this U.S. microcosm is completed with the depiction of the town as barbarous. With a clear reminiscence of the Roman circus, the Governor leads Andrea to a raucous gathering for the townsfolk: a sparring match between Merle and Martínez while surrounded by chained, toothless walkers. The spectacle shocks Andrea, who describes it as barbaric, but the Governor insists it is fun and a collective exorcism that teaches the residents to not be afraid. As Woodbury progressively becomes a radicalized organic version, Episode 11 shows the direct link between the Governor’s policy and Nazism. The Governor prepares the town for total war. Civilians, including women and adolescents, are given weapons and taught to use them, in preparation for combat. The Governor concludes that adolescence is a twentieth-century invention (3x11), thus proving his totalitarian policy which includes women and adolescents. Andrea is disturbed by this and asks to leave to negotiate a peace

¹¹ The Governor’s mask stands for what Giroux calls “authoritarianism with a friendly face” (2011: 6). In the comic version, the Governor is more openly sanguinary: he cuts Rick’s hand (#28) and tortures and rapes Michonne (#28 #29).

with the prison, but the Governor discourages her, implying that she will not be welcomed back if she leaves, a clear indication that Woodbury is another prison, just like the one where Rick's group stays in. The connection of Woodbury and Nazi Germany is made clear when, in a conversation between Merle and Michonne, Michonne compares Woodbury with the Gestapo. In relation to the leading roles of Rick and the Governor, Michonne states: "I did not realize the messiah complex was contagious" (3x11), thus connecting the topic of immanence and contagion. After a tactful and strategic control of his community ("I had to stretch the truth a little bit, but just a little", 3x16), in the Season finale the Governor openly reveals his sanguinary real self. After the defeat of his men by Rick's group, when most of the citizen-soldiers express a desire to return to Woodbury, the Governor shoots them, killing most of the group. This sanguinary act symbolically reveals the danger of self-destruction in immanent communities.

The open radicalization of the Governor, together with Carl's sanguinary evolution in the series, is the unleashing force that facilitates *transimmanence* not only in Rick's group but also in Woodbury. One of the survivors of the Governor's massacre, Karen, accompanies Rick's group to Woodbury and convinces the standing guards to stand down, explaining how the Governor killed everyone. Woodbury citizens join Rick's group, who eventually opens up and abandons its immanence. Indeed, Rick marks his difference from the Governor and welcomes democracy once again: "I'm not your Governor ...We vote" (3x15). The open reference to the Governor indicates that Rick's change is marked by contrast with that totalitarian figure¹².

There are two characters in Season 3 whose symbolic, transimmanent value cannot be underestimated: Merle and Lori's newly-born baby Judith. Merle's evolution from the beginning of the series is remarkable. His saturated racist and sexist figure in the original community of Season 1, in Daryl's hallucinations of Season 2, and in Woodbury in Season 3 gives way to the Governor's betrayal when he presents Merle as a Blanchotian scapegoat to Woodbury. To restore order in a moment of crisis a sacrifice is necessary, a scapegoat that will cleanse the community from distorting elements and reaffirm the rules and laws upon which the community is founded: "The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence" (Girard, 1977: 8), and Merle is the perfect example. He opens to alterity. Towards the end of the series, he confesses to Michonne: "You're as much on the outside as I am, girl" (3x15), for the first time showing his link with alterity,

¹² In the comic version, it is not Rick who chooses democracy. After his dictatorial behavior, the group decides to create a committee, "something more democratic. Four guys with equal votes" (#24 p. 10).

here represented by a black woman. He rejects his belonging to Woodbury and dies for the transimmanent community where he has been welcomed back.

In turn, Judith represents hope for Rick's community due to its biblical connections and direct link with the zombie metaphor. In the *Book of Judith* a widow, who is upset with her Jewish people for not trusting God to deliver them from their foreign conquerors, goes to the camp of the enemy general, Holofernes. Gaining his trust, Judith is allowed access to his tent one night, where she decapitates him and takes his head back to her fearful countrymen. Having lost their leader, the Assyrians disperse, and Israel is saved. The connection of Judith with the decapitation topic of the series is evident. The newly-born in the middle of a post-apocalyptic atmosphere represents hope. There is an interesting connection between Judith and Andrea. It seems that the latter, who develops an almost maternal link with the baby, communes with her name and stands as hope to destroy the totalitarianism represented by the Governor. On several occasions she has the opportunity to kill him (3x11 and 3x14), but she does not fulfill the action and is finally killed indirectly by the Governor, who leaves dying Milton in the same room as Andrea and, after turning into a zombie, he bites her. It seems that the real Judith, the baby, stands as hope for Rick's community. A widow in the biblical version, a foundling in the series, she might eventually offer the key for the redemption of a community that, at least by the end of Season 3, recovers its *transimmanence* and embraces alterity in a post-apocalyptic world.

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