Preparing for Monsters: Governance by Popular Culture

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Introduction

How and why is the zombie metaphor applied in efforts that seek to alert citizens to and prepare them for potential threats and disasters? And what are the consequences of applying this specific metaphor in attempts to govern populations? This article examines the real-world political implications that come from the recurring adoption of a particular pop-cultural figuration as a guiding, and sometimes even governing, metaphor. More specifically, it looks at how the zombie has been used to promote the necessity for 'preparing' for the future in specific ways. While much has already been said about the zombie, this article adds to the current body of knowledge on the subject by looking at how the zombie metaphor has been applied for governing purposes. As such, the article provides analytical tools for studying how pop-cultural metaphors are used as 'premediations' — that is, as tools for practical governance in relation to both current and future threats — and for studying the potential implications that comes from such premediations, a term discussed below.[1]

Over the last decade or so, the academic interest in the zombie has increased exponentially, producing a vast body of scholarly and popular discussion. Since the zombie is a fictitious creature, it is also inevitable that its modern incarnation has become a highly mediated figuration (in that it practically always uses a medium for its cultural distribution).[2] This article explores how the zombie is now also premediated as a very practical and political metaphor in, for example, civil-defence courses, government information campaigns, and popular-science TV shows. These applications of the zombie metaphor differ from more fiction-oriented pop-cultural depictions, as their underlying and express purpose is to govern — to make people more aware of societal contingencies and to generate a corresponding behavioural change, and, on a more fundamental level, to promote a particular view regarding who deserves to live and who must die. This article therefore takes specific interest in how the zombie metaphor is used to govern and promote certain practical and emotional preparations for future catastrophes. As such, this article examines how the deliberate practical and political application of the pop-cultural zombie metaphor comes to legitimise a

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[1] Richard Grusin, 'Premediation', *Criticism*, 46 (2004), 17-39.
[2] Allan Cameron, 'Zombie Media: Transmission, Reproduction, and the Digital Dead', *Cinema Journal*, 52 (2012), 66-89.

profoundly regularising view of the future, one that excludes all but 'properly prepared' individuals.

Before exploring how the zombie metaphor is used to govern the future, we need to establish what the zombie 'is', how it was originally depicted in pop-cultural narratives and how has it been studied in academic analyses. After establishing these preconditions, the article analyses three cases where the zombie metaphor is used to promote contingency awareness and thereby also to promote a specific view of how to prepare practically for the future: first, a zombie-survival course; second, a number of governmental emergency-information campaigns; and third, a popular-science TV show on 'how to survive the end of the world'. In doing so, the article asserts that the adoption of the zombie metaphor for political and governing purposes brings about a treacherous binary opposition, which conflates a range of potential agendas and obscures both power differentials and alternative futures.

The Pop-Cultural Zombie

The zombie has a rich history consisting of variations on the theme of a living being that returns from the dead.[3] One of the primary and most important recurring themes is what we may refer to as the 'rules of the zombie', rules which determine what they are and what they are capable of doing. As this article demonstrates, such rules are very important both in pop-cultural adaptations in general, and in the case studies this article examines. A specific piece of fictional work that highlights the rules of the zombie is *The Zombie Survival Guide*, where author Max Brooks provides very precise instructions and rules for how to survive the zombie apocalypse.[4] The reason for starting with this particular book, apart from its huge popularity and cultural attraction, is that the very concept of a 'zombie rulebook', we argue, has come to colour not only many pop-cultural narratives (perhaps most notably the movie *Zombieland*), but also to frame how the zombie metaphor has subsequently been adopted in crisis-awareness politics (it is, for example, used as course literature in the zombie-survival course examined below).[5]

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[3] Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz, 'Infection, Media, and Capitalism: From Early Modern Plagues to Postmodern Zombies', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 10 (2010), 126-47.

[4] Max Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003).

[5] Jon C. Ogg, 'Zombies Worth over $5 Billion to Economy: The Walking Undead Reflect Our Anxieties over Scary Times', *NBC News*, 31 October 2011 <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/45079546/ns/business-stocks_and_economy/t/zombies-worth-over-billion-economy/#.U14c9cfai5s> [accessed 28 April 2014].

The Zombie Survival Guide was published in 2003, but it was not until 2010 that sales started to increase rapidly. A sequel entitled *World War Z* was published in 2006 and was made into a movie starring Brad Pitt in 2013. Recent internet rumours suggest that *The Zombie Survival Guide* will also be adapted for the cinema, emphasising the sustained fascination with the zombie figuration.[6] *The Zombie Survival Guide* begins with a chapter entitled 'The Undead: Myths and Realities', in which Brooks debunks 'myths' about the zombie by answering questions such as '[w]hat is a zombie? How are they created? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What are their needs, their desires? Why are they hostile to humanity?'[7] According to Brooks, the underlying cause of the existence of zombies is the fictional *Solanum* virus. This virus, in Brooks' formulation, effectively transforms an infected living human being into a member of the living dead over the course of twenty-four hours. Under the two headings 'Physicality' and 'Behavioural Patterns', we learn that a zombie is essentially a dead, reanimated human without cognitive faculties; it is incurable; it wants to eat (and thereby infect) living humans; and the only way to kill one (which is the only way to deal with one, basically) is to destroy his or her brain. We also learn that the ultimate goal of a living human being who encounters zombies is to survive and 'not to be a hero' (that is, try to help others before themselves). A particularly noteworthy rule is that the zombie state cannot be changed or cured: 'It will exist as is, or it will not exist at all.'[8]. This last phrase is significant; it essentially states that one principal rule of the zombie is that the rules cannot be changed. This is also the case more widely in cultural adaptations of the zombie. While both fans and academics certainly discuss interpretations of and details relating to the zombie, it is also very much the case that the elementary rules presented by Brooks often persist unchallenged.

Interestingly, Brooks constantly calls on a somewhat vague notion of 'science' as evidence of his claims. We are not so much questioning the rather liberal citation techniques used here (we are fully aware that the guide is a work of fiction), as calling attention to the repeated use of 'scientific' explanations and alleged studies as support. As an extension of the 'scientifically proven' zombie at the centre of his work, Brooks also highlights how 'fake' zombies, such as the voodoo zombie (a zombie created through drugs and/or asphyxia-caused brain damage) and the Hollywood zombie (a trendy cinematic depiction, which, he insists,

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[6] Jared Pacheco, 'Max Brooks Confirms Zombie Survival Guide Films & World War Z Starring Brad Pitt!', *Arrow in the Head*, 22 July 2010 <http://www.joblo.com/horror-movies/news/max-brooks-confirms-zombie-survival-guide-films-world-war-z-starring-brad-pitt> [accessed 19 August 2016].
[7] Brooks, *Zombie Survival Guide*, p. 1.
[8] Brooks, *Zombie Survival Guide*, p. 19.

has little in common with the scientifically corroborated zombie) can be separated from what he positions as the real thing. Brooks asserts that the voodoo zombie is not genuine since it is more human than the viral zombie (in that it can communicate, feel pain, think, and show emotion). Meanwhile, the Hollywood zombie is merely a popularised version of the 'real thing', and, he states, films featuring them can only ever be 'a source of temporary, light-hearted entertainment and not a visual aid to your survival'.[9] This latter statement is, however, only partly true as the pop-cultural zombie, as this article argues, has become vital source material for more serious and practical preparations for actual disasters.

Indeed, today, the so-called viral zombie, as exemplified in Brooks' survival guide (and movies such as *28 Days Later* (2002) and the *Resident Evil* films (2002-present)), has become a specific metaphor for a complex cocktail of future threats. When asked about why the zombie has become so popular, Brooks himself concludes that

> they reflect our very real anxieties of these crazy scary times. A zombie story gives people a fictional lens to see the real problems of the world. You can deal with societal breakdown, famine, disease, chaos in the streets, but as long as the catalyst for all of them is zombies, you can still sleep.[10]

The zombie is constructed here as a very specific and pre-determined metaphor, a metaphor which can then be applied to many other (more real) worries that future outlooks may generate. That is, while zombies in pop culture are not all as inflexible as Brooks' account, most of them comply with the rulebook (in itself a sign of the authority of the rules). Rule-adhering movies such as *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Re-animator* (1985), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *The Zombie Diaries* (2006), *The Dead* (2010), *Eaters* (2011), *The Resident Evil* series, *Zombieland* (2009), *World War Z* (2013), and many more, make up the bulk of conventional zombie films. Of course, there are a few that challenge or subvert the basic structure, such as *Fido* (2006), *Wasting Away* (2007), *Pontypool* (2008), *Otto; or Up with Dead People* (2008), and *Warm Bodies* (2013), which offer potentially more empathic and hopeful interpretations of zombies. However, even these alternative routes follow many of the fundamental directions of the original pop-cultural zombie (such as Othering and cherry-picked pseudo-science). This further supports the argument that the zombie *is* a fairly bolted-down model for what we call premediating the

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[9] Brooks, *Zombie Survival Guide*, p. 23.
[10] Brooks, 'A Conversation with Max Brooks', 2014 <http://www.maxbrookszombieworld.com/> [accessed 15 February 2016].

future. The question is, then, whether the rules continue to apply when the zombie moves from pop-cultural accounts to attempts at political governance.

Academic Analyses of the Zombie

Before we attempt to answer this question ourselves, we need to survey previous attempts to respond to similar queries. From an academic point of view, the zombie can be seen as a specific subcategory of monsters, and monstrosity is a theme that has received much scholarly attention.[11] Monstrosity has been described as a subversive position from which a theorisation of resistance and a challenge to anthropocentrism can emerge — 'a transhistorical site of challenge to the rational, autonomous, masculine subject and to the category of the human itself'.[12] As a subcategory of the monstrous, the zombie integrates the destabilising qualities of monstrosity more generally. For example, Jillian Burcar shows how the zombie can work to dissolve commonly dichotomised categories such as gender or sexuality.[13] Contrasted against the cyborgian Other, the representation of the zombified other 'calls for the destruction of the old order by rethinking the ways post-industrial economies conceive of gender and sexuality today'; in other words, the zombie functions as a more positive alternative to the rational chilliness and hyper-artificiality of the cyborg.[14] Dan Hassler-Forest offers similar arguments, claiming that the zombie is commonly associated with the destabilisation of patriarchal or colonial imperialist power.[15] Gary A. Mullen presents an interesting reading of the zombie as a cultural metaphor through the lenses of Theodor Adorno and Slavoj Žižek.[16] Illustrating two opposing perspectives, Žižek is presented as arguing for the right to use defensive, or even revolutionary, violence (against zombies and their cultural representation), and Adorno as arguing for a more alienating

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[11] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993); Donna Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others', in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 295-337; and Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, 'Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots', *Social Text*, 20 (2002), 117-48.

[12] Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 121.

[13] Jillian Burcar, 'Living Appendages of the Machine: Reproducing Sex and Gender in Cyborg and Zombie Narratives, from Battlestar Galactica to the Walking Dead', in *Creating Humanity, Discovering Monstrosity: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. by Elizabeth Nelson, Jillian Burcar, and Hannah Priest (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), pp. 403-12.

[14] Burcar, p. 403.

[15] Dan Hassler-Forest, 'Cowboys and Zombies: Destabilizing Patriarchal Discourse in the Walking Dead', *Studies in Comics*, 2 (2011), 339-55.

[16] Gary A. Mullen, 'Adorno, Žižek, and the Zombie: The Representation of Death in an Age of Mass Killing', *Journal for Cultural and Religious Studies*, 13 (2014), 48-57.

perspective, where citizens are now suffering under the inhumanity of post-industrial institutions and practices, and treated as zombies, even in the afterlife.

The zombie's subversive potential has, however, also been interrogated. In a number of close readings of zombie texts, several scholars raise issues concerning the zombie's recent positioning as a subversive monster. Gordon Coonfield evokes the idea of the *zombie imaginary* as an umbrella term for the representations generated by the very idea of the zombie.[17] He further proposes that the zombie is a 'perfect stranger', putting forward the notion that zombies are the polar opposite of the human in many ways (through, for instance, the dichotomies of dead-alive and us-them). However, Coonfield also acknowledges the human history of the zombie (as *someone* turned into *something*) and proposes an ethical consideration of how the zombie engenders a view of difference that is essentially unjust (that is, of the zombie as a thing that must be killed by people who are still 'real' people). Jessica Murray examines two literary cases (Lily Herne's *Deadlands* (2011) and *Death of a Saint* (2012)) and states that, while the zombie metaphor opens up to some alternative constructions/readings of gender and sexuality, it also maintains traditional patriarchal and heteronormative dichotomies (such as the vulnerability of women, homophobia, and prescribed gender roles).[18] Steve Jones presents a similar case, highlighting how patriarchy seems to linger in zombie narratives.[19]

However, unlike Jones's assertion that 'when gendered female, the undead fittingly symbolize this discursive history of femininity under patriarchy', this article argues that the gendering of the zombie in itself is not necessary for patriarchal structures to emerge as a result of the application of the zombie metaphor.[20] Instead, the most problematic binary is created through the Othering of the zombie itself, as 'it' is *specified, estranged, and stamped* for clear separation in the discourses discussed here. Kevan A. Feshami draws attention to this desire to clarify what the zombie is and does. He states,

> Its lack of identity ensures its easy dissolution into the faceless mass of a
> zombie horde while nevertheless inviting, even demanding, fans, critics, and

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[17] Gordon Coonfield, 'Perfect Strangers: The Zombie Imaginary and the Logic of Representation', in *Thinking Dead: What the Zombie Apocalypse Means*, ed. by Murali Balaji (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 3-16.
[18] Jessica Murray, 'A Zombie Apocalypse: Opening Representational Spaces for Alternative Constructions of Gender and Sexuality', *Journal of Literary Studies*, 29 (2013), 1-19.
[19] Steve Jones, 'Gender Monstrosity: Deadgirl and the Sexual Politics of Zombie-Rape', *Feminist Media Studies*, 13 (2013), 525-39.
[20] Jones, p. 530.

filmmakers to provide it with identity, with purpose, to manage the horror its lack of identity entails.[21]

When publically disseminated and consumed, the separation of the zombie as Other engenders both discursive and material power differentials. The theoretical nuances and potentially disruptive capacities of zombies-as-monsters are thus lost due to a fundamental rupture and subsequent hostility between humanity and what is now something else. This separation, we argue here, is maintained by the arbitrary, but specific, 'rules of zombies'. Indeed, the edited volume *Zombies are Us* begins by clarifying how the rules relating to the zombie comprise a recurrent necessity for practically all zombie narratives and, although some nuances are debated, the general thrust of the rules remain the same throughout the genre (zombies are brought back from the dead; they consume the living, thereby turning them into zombies as well; and they can only be killed by destroying their brains).[22]

So, while there is a large body of work identifying and positioning the zombie as a troubling and ambiguous in-between representation that can fruitfully be mined for subversive purposes, there is also a consistent return of more-or-less precise rules that need to be followed — rules that, when read through a cultural political lens, are profoundly problematic. For example, Lina Rahm has examined the rules of 'prepping' (practically preparing for the apocalypse), where the zombie is a recurring metaphorical threat, and has identified a predominant view that the physical body best predicted to survive an apocalyptic scenario is one that resorts to military skills, military tactics, military outfits, and military arms.[23] In other words, this means that independent, resourceful, sceptical *men* loaded with 'proper' gear and 'proper' skills are often seen as the ones best equipped to outlast 'the rest'. Following Rahm, one could therefore argue that one important reason why zombies have become so popular as a practical metaphor is because they *do not* challenge or upset many current power differentials — the zombie metaphor corresponds well to the normative model of the 'best prepared body', and reinforces the development of skills and mindsets that are fundamentally sexist, ageist, and ableist.

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[21] Kevan A. Feshami, 'Death Is Only the Beginning: George A. Romero's Model of the Zombie and Its Threat to Identity', in *Creating Humanity, Discovering Monstrosity*, ed. by Elizabeth Nelson, Jillian Burcar, and Hannah Priest (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), pp. 395-402 (p. 400).

[22] See *Zombies Are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead*, ed. by Christopher M. Moreman and Cory James Rushton (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011).

[23] Lina Rahm, 'Who Will Survive? On Bodies and Boundaries after the Apocalypse', *Gender Forum*, 45 (2013) <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/special-issue-early-career-researchers-i/who-will-survive-on-bodies-and-boundaries-after-the-apocalypse/> [accessed 1 September 2016].

Premediation and Folk Models

How can we understand this preoccupation with monsters in general and zombies in particular? Premediation theory offers one possible way in. Premediation can be defined as the way we, as media-consuming citizens, increasingly desire media representations of potential futures. This desire works through a double media logic consisting of both a longing for security and safety (by preparing us for as many future scenarios as possible) and a concurrent limitation of the possible options in the future (as a way to deal with the overwhelming prospect of *all* potential futures). That is, there is an emotional element to premediation in that it seeks to foresee likely events in order to reduce anxiety. However, there is also a political element at play, as the delimitations of potential scenarios obscure other ways to think about the future. This mutually reinforcing combination of emotional comfort and the limitation of options is at the heart of premediation.

In light of the discussion above, it would seem that the current attraction of the zombie as an all-purpose model for envisioning future threats can fruitfully be analysed via the premediation concept. Under this framework, the underlying logic of the zombie is to induce comfort in the face the overwhelming and potentially demoralising complexity of the future, allowing us to imagine that we know more precisely what we are dealing with, in order to develop the 'correct' corresponding coping plans and thus reduce anxiety. However, this strategy is by no means neutral or disinterested. Rather, this article argues that the zombie, in its practical application, is a deeply unjust and limiting metaphor that too often perpetuates power differentials. As outlined above, the zombie comes with a very clear set of rules as to how it should 'work'. As such, the zombie is depicted and conveyed as a specific cultural figuration, one that is employed in order to induce a very particular kind of response. These premediations also have more fundamental political consequences in that they effectively also determine who deserves to live and who must die (what Mbembe calls necropolitics).[24] The zombie therefore occupies a cultural nexus of meanings. Taken together, the prevalent use of the zombie to premediate the future; the specific rules it follows; the specific kind of responses it induces; and its necropolitical underpinnings combine to produce what we may call a *folk model* of the zombie.

Put simply, a folk model is a culturally shared cognitive model — an everyday explanatory framework that is commonplace. As such, folk models are clearly related to the notion of the conceptual metaphor (that is, the understanding of one idea, or conceptual

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[24] Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15 (2003), 11-40.

domain, in terms of another); indeed, the two notions are arguably interchangeable.[25] However, for the purposes of this article, the folk model is the more useful of the two, since it highlights the significant difference between the academic interpretations of the (pop-cultural) zombie metaphor and the practical public application of the metaphor in hands-on disaster preparation. The conceptualisation of what constitutes a folk model has its roots in early cultural anthropology, where it includes dimensions of perception, thought, feeling, desire, intention, and even action.[26] A folk model is not necessarily 'accurate in the real world', but the fact that it recurs in a specific culture means that the phenomenon lends itself to study. This article investigates the mechanisms through which the zombie folk model operates in society (rather than meticulously describing the multitude of representations and variations on the theme in popular culture). Another way of putting it is to say that this article explores the connection between premediation (as a cultural media logic) and preparation (as the material practices that premediation encourages), using the folk model of the zombie as a significant example. To this end, it is useful to examine three cases of how the zombie folk model is applied in practically oriented contexts.

The Zombie Folk Model in Practice

In this section we describe how the zombie metaphor is applied in three practical cases of crisis preparedness. As mentioned previously, these cases are viewed here as exceptional since they are underpinned by a very clear purpose — to change people's behaviour, or at least to make them think of the *real* implications of an actual zombie outbreak. All three examples can thus be regarded as cases of premediating folk models.

Learning to Survive the Zombie Apocalypse

ABF is Sweden's largest adult liberal-education association. The abbreviation stands for the Workers' Educational Association (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund* in Swedish). ABF is one of Sweden's ten liberal-education associations; it organises courses for approximately 1.7 million students each year. As part of our data collection on the proliferation of the zombie folk model, we have taken part in a course entitled 'Surviving the Zombie Apocalypse', which was provided by ABF in 2014 and in two different Swedish cities. Each course consists of six seminars or lectures, complemented by suggested readings. Brooks' *Zombie*

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[25] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
[26] Roy G. D'Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Survival Guide is a fundamental part of these readings and of the definition of the zombie underpinning the course. We want to emphasise that we are not interested in critiquing ABF or the courses themselves — we find them very inspiring and well organised. Rather, we are using the courses, and our participation in them, as examples of the circulation of the zombie folk model.

We deployed an autobiographical method when reporting our findings from these courses. This brand of reflexive writing tries to make the connections between biography and social structure more explicit.[27] Combining the autobiographical approach with participatory observation generates what we may call an autoethnographic approach. As Tami Spry puts it, autoethnography is 'the convergence of the "autobiographic impulse" and the "ethnographic moment" represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse in performance, articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the inner sanctions of the always migratory identity'.[28] As such, we aim to connect *ourselves* more clearly to the cultural politics and taken-for-granted rules of the zombie folk model. For reasons relating to space, we focus here on certain key moments in the application of the zombie metaphor. The first example occurred during a practical fire-crafting exercise, where the course leader reflected on how there are rules and laws about where and how to build a fire. In response,

> One participant quickly remarks, 'once the zombies arrive, we don't give a shit what you say'. The entire group bursts into laughter. Cheerful from the comment, all of us jointly walk back to the classroom.

This statement indicates an expectation that civilised procedures will effectively be ignored in a real crisis situation. The zombie is arguably used here as an inclusive metaphor for many types of crises; nonetheless, it is also a metaphor with very specific connotations, one with the capacity to generate a rather drastic response (a disregard of more civilised rules regulating behaviour).

Another interesting moment occurred when participants discussed how the zombie metaphor has been applied by (Swedish) public agencies:

> We sit a circle formation in a classroom. The topic of the day is crisis preparedness on a societal level. A teacher asks us if we have studied the

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[27] Jeff Hearn, 'Autobiography, Nation, Postcolonialism and Gender Relations: Reflecting on Men in England, Finland, and Ireland', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 14 (2005), 66-93.
[28] Tami Spry, 'Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7 (2001), 706-32 (p. 706).

governmental homepages he suggested last week. He starts reading from the homepage of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency:

We often receive questions about our preparedness concerning zombies. So, how prepared are we? Do we have an action plan for the zombie apocalypse? The answer is no. We do not have a plan for fighting zombies. We have no flyers on how to avoid the zombie virus. We also do not have a stock of chainsaws, sawed-off shotguns, or Molotov cocktails ready for distribution in the case of an outbreak. Nevertheless, we are prepared. Swedish crisis preparation builds on a collective responsibility for our land, our own security, and the safety of our loved ones. This means there are measures you can take to be better prepared for both blackouts and zombies. Thus, we are ready — but are you?

The teacher tells us that the Public Health Agency of Sweden lists 27 risks, where a pandemic is the most serious one. 'Pandemic is the word they are using for the zombie apocalypse', he says, and the group laughs. 'How do you think the governmental agencies would act in the case of a zombie outbreak?' One participant says that the authorities would probably not tell the truth, but soften their information. 'Maybe even misinform us', someone says. Assenting murmuring and nodding follows. 'Nobody would dare to take THE decision', someone says. 'I mean, who would face up to the decision of bombing an entire suburb if it's infected? Or an infected hospital?' 'Nah, authorities will maybe try to isolate the infected, but they will devote more time to thinking of a non-offensive term for the undead.' Everyone laughs again. The group then starts discussing how the level of preparedness was much higher during the Cold War and how things have only gotten worse since. Public state-managed food storages and weapons storages are discussed. 'Everyone should be a little more paranoid. Then we would be better prepared as a society.' The teacher adds, 'I think we have to take on the mission of creating paranoia'. More laughter (possibly in recognition that paranoia is a lingering accusation from people who are not survivalists, and thereby seen as not as informed).

Our final example moment comes from the very end of one of the courses:

At the end of the course everyone is presented with a diploma and a free copy of the first issue of the graphic novel *The Walking Dead* in Swedish. On my way out, a co-participant joins me. I ask what she thought of the course. 'Superfun', she says. 'But it is always the same — no one dares to speak up in the group. Only a few were actually contributing to the discussion.' 'Maybe that's why there were so many couples there? Because it is hard to speak up on your own?' I add. 'No', she replies, 'I think the woman in the relationship just wanted to do something together, and this is the only thing the guy would come along to'.

Our abridged autoethnographic account of these courses illustrates not only practical applications of the zombie metaphor, but also the proliferation of a specific skill-set and

mind-set, which is justified, valorised, and legitimised through the completely arbitrary, yet specific rules that have become attached to the figure of the zombie. For example, the courses become an outlet for people's desire to return in both time and place, either to go back to a time that was better prepared, or to return to nature and survive in the wilderness in harmony with it. This desire to return to 'the good old times' or to a 'natural' state of things also relates to the way in which the zombie is regarded as something profoundly unnatural and disconnected from nature. The very idea that a zombie virus could spread through contaminated water, toxic downfall, infested animal meat, the air, or another integral part of nature is considered as 'breaking the zombie rules' and would ruin much of the preferred solutions to the zombie (such as acquiring survival gear and skills). In other words, adding too much complexity (and thereby changing the rules) to the metaphor kills what is referred to as the 'natural joy of skilled and gear-driven life in the great outdoors'.

As the above quotations also indicate, the courses nurture a paradoxical relation to public information and authorities. While survivalists are generally distrusting towards governments and authorities, they also maintain a certain sense of the benevolence of these institutions, one grounded in the increasing governmental recognition and propagation of the zombie as a universal metaphor. It is therefore important to examine further the application of the zombie metaphor as employed by governments and public agencies.

Government Information and the Zombie Folk Model

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention admits that their zombie-preparedness campaign started out as a jocular satire.[29] Nevertheless, they now also acknowledge that it provides a great platform for communication. The director of the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, Dr Ali Khan, has gone so far as to say, '[i]f you are generally well equipped to deal with a zombie apocalypse you will be prepared for a hurricane, pandemic, earthquake, or terrorist attack'.[30] While we are not critical of the use of the zombie metaphor as a marketing tool that is employed in order to reach new audiences, as we argue here, the fact that government authorities also choose to use the *zombie* so uncritically, and in such a generalising manner, may have unintended consequences.

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[29] Center for Disease Control, 'Zombie Preparedness', 2014 <http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/zombies.htm> [accessed 10 April 2015].
[30] 'CDC Director Thomas Frieden Plays "Not My Job"', *Wait Wait ... Don't Tell Me!*, NPR, 21 September 2012 <http://www.npr.org/2012/09/22/161566065/cdc-director-thomas-frieden-plays-not-my-job> [accessed 23 September 2016].

Recently, a news story surfaced revealing that the US military keeps unclassified documents containing plans for 'counter zombie dominance'. In a familiar move, 'military planners […] looked for a creative way to devise a planning document to protect citizens in the event of *an attack of any kind*. The officers used zombies as their muse.'[31] Naturally, officials emphasised that this was a document intended for training purposes only and not a real contingency plan. Nevertheless, the way in which the zombie is generalised here, allowing it to encompass any conceivable hazard, is salient.

In essence, what this information is telling citizens is that, in the case of a catastrophe, the thing one should be most worried about can be boiled down to Other(ed) people. The message is that if you prepare to defend yourself against people who *were* like you, but that have now turned into *something else,* you will be safe against anything. However, the zombie is easy to spot, and its monstrosity ensures that you do not have to feel guilty for defending yourself against it (by killing it). As such, the required skill-set for dealing with the zombie is unsurprisingly identical to military weapons techniques and combat survival skills. The seamless match between the strongly masculinised ways of preparing for disruption (in effect, training for battle) and the war-like future of the zombie apocalypse is, of course, no coincidence. These phenomena seem to co-develop and feed off of each other, almost to the degree that one could regard them as attempts to make citizens more akin to the military.

American authorities are, of course, not the only ones to apply the zombie-apocalypse metaphor. As already mentioned, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency has also addressed its preparedness for the zombie apocalypse.[32] The agency's reasoning employs an identical rationale, asserting that being prepared for a zombie apocalypse makes one prepared for *any* other disaster or contingency, again using the popular zombie as a conflating metaphor. The adoption of the zombie metaphor in governmental campaigns indicates an opportunistic approach, as they piggyback on pop-culture hype. A similar trend can be seen in popular science, as the following section demonstrates.

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[31] Gordon Lubold, 'Exclusive: The Pentagon Has a Plan to Stop the Zombie Apocalypse. Seriously', *Foreign Policy*, 13 May 2014 <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/05/13/exclusive_the_pentagon_has_a_plan_to_stop_the_zombie_apocalypse> [accessed 21 May 2015].

[32] Krisinformation.se, 'Vi Är Redo För Zombieapokalypsen' (Stockholm: Krisinformation.se, 2013). <https://krisinformation.wordpress.com/2013/08/08/vi-ar-redo-for-zombieapokalypsen/> [accessed 17 September 2016]

How to Survive the End of the World: Zombie Earth

> *Is a 'zombie apocalypse' simply a concept of fiction or could an infectious disease REALLY turn humanity into a race of vicious, seething monsters? The truth just might shock you!*
> –from the synopsis to the 'Zombie Earth' episode of *How to Survive the End of the World*'

How to Survive the End of the World is a National Geographic television series that deals with a variety of apocalyptic scenarios. This particular episode is interesting in that it emphasises a jump from fiction to (potential) reality by presenting (or premediating) a narrative chain of proposed problems and continuously discarded solutions (including vaccines, isolation, quarantines), effectively leading up to what is presented as an inevitable conclusion (that we would simply have to rely on natural immunity in a limited part of the Earth's population).

Significantly, the links of the chain are composed of seemingly arbitrary oscillations between 'us' and various 'Others' (mammals, viruses, insects, careless foreign nations, infected people, hazardous waste, bioweapons research). In this regard, this episode does take a more holistic approach towards a pandemic disease than many other instances of the use of the zombie metaphor, in that here, 'nature' is actually part of the context of the problem. Nevertheless, the programme also makes clear that a sharp distinction operates between them ('infected careless Others') and us ('uninfected militarised western humans'). The narrated chain of events is also constantly backed up by 'science' in the sense that anecdotal medical, political, and scientific issues (including details relating to anything from disease transmission and polities to waste disposal and fauna) are linked to proposed problems and (discarded) solutions.

Interestingly, the inevitable solution predicted by the programme, which is also framed as our last hope, is natural immunity. That is, people who are naturally immune to the virus in question are presented as the only viable remedy to the complete extinction of humankind (as it envisages that those who are immune would set up a society of their own after the rest of us die off). In this case, a number of potential options for the future are efficiently ruled out by scientific evidence — an attempt at making the preconditions (or rules) of the episode's narrative appear rigid and unquestionable. This elimination of alternatives presents a future in which human struggle is largely futile, and where luck is presented as our best chance at survival. As such, the episode does not underline any

particular agenda for preparation. So, while the programme's conclusion may leave audiences with a sense of helplessness, the logic of the zombie folk model is still largely in effect. The use of the zombie metaphor operates according to specific rules (supported by science and the elimination of alternatives); it is still presented as something that can 'help us prepare for *whatever* the future may bring' (a quotation from the programme); and it emphasises a return (a 'restart' even) to simpler conditions for humankind.[33]

A Folk Model of Familiar Monsters and How the Zombie Became a Metaphor We Prepare By

As the zombie has become the metaphor we prepare by, it has also come to conflate and oversimplify many possible (complex) threats. The zombie has become a folk model aimed at producing a specific brand of fear and offering subsequent comfortable transparency in overcoming the source of the fear. Emerging out of the cinema screen, synthesised by scholarly analyses of its disruptive and/or stabilising potential, the zombie is now employed in governance, such as civil-defence courses, edutainment, and governmental information. At the same time, the zombie is but one case of a larger, more theoretically grounded, category of monsters. Leaning on premediation theory, we have argued that the zombie is part of a folk model that limits future scenarios severely. This limitation occurs by a specification of rules relying on pseudo-science. Such specification aims at moving an unknown monster (which is genuinely disconcerting) into the realm of the familiar, while still retaining a distinct Otherness.

Through civil-defence courses and governmental information campaigns, we are also witnessing a dissemination of the folk model of familiar monsters, of which the zombie folk model is one case. To summarise this development, we argue that folk models of familiar monsters emphasise a worldview where complexity has become too overwhelming to handle, implying that we therefore need to go back to a simpler model of the world. It also proposes a solution to complexity in the application of an anthropocentric metaphor that makes specific what was previously unknown through arbitrary ruling and Othering. Following this, once complexity is reduced, the metaphor is easily over-generalised to contexts far beyond its initial reach. However, as such rules and generalisations are applied, the metaphor comes to legitimise certain agencies and limit others in what is basically an attempt to maintain power

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[33] Bill McLane, 'Zombie Earth', *How to Survive the End of the World*, National Geographic Channel, 21 December 2013.

differentials in the future. Finally, the folk model is also being protected from being debunked by relying on pseudo-scientific explanations.

We have presented clear indications of the pervasiveness of the zombie in popular culture today. Movies, games, books, television shows, graphic novels, and zombie walks (essentially protest marches in zombie costumes) are all expressions of the metaphor and genres that have reached new levels of popularity. Within academic discourse, the zombie is also gaining recognition as a metaphor for various aspects of work cultures in academic institutions.[34] While the zombie metaphor in academia may show some subtlety and nuance in terms of its definition and analytical applicability, the folk model of the familiar monster and the zombie is simpler, more rigidly defined and narrow in scope. Importantly, this simplicity and reduction of complexity in future scenarios comes with political consequences.

As previously stated, zombies are essentially reanimated dead humans without cognitive faculties; they are incurable; they want to eat (and thereby contaminate) living humans; and the only way to kill them (which, we are repeatedly assured, is the only way to deal with them) is to destroy their brains. Because the zombie is so clearly Othered and objectified (they experience no pain, no reason, no empathy, and so on), it is legitimate to kill them. In fact, it is the only solution — in the texts we have been discussing in this article, no cure exists, and the rules cannot be changed. Consequently, the war on zombies is a war without refinement, compassion, or diversity. The reduction and specification of the zombie enemy concurrently reduces and specifies the ideal human subject to a killing machine based on instinct.

The logic of such a catastrophe envisages society relapsing by (somewhat paradoxically) stepping back in time to an imaginary future characterised by primitive instincts and survival rather than multiplicity and deliberation. Zombies have no potential to change and thereby nor do we — we just persist by exterminating them. The metaphor of the zombie apocalypse is therefore clear-cut and apparently dispassionate. Of course, it would, if it actually occurred, disrupt everyday life, but, as a way of thinking about the future, it hardly unsettles the current distribution of power. Thus, the zombie is a dangerous metaphor since it suggests that the potential threat is, in fact, other people (or people turned into 'Others') and the only solution is to annihilate them completely (or give up). There is little or no room for discussion, cures, or alternative solutions. In many ways, the zombie is immune to external falsification, since it is a simplification that leaves a diversity of assertions (such as biological

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[34] *Zombies in the Academy: Living Death in Higher Education*, ed. by Andrew Whelan, Ruth Walker, and Christopher Moore (Bristol: Intellect, 2013).

variations, gender-related norms, power distribution, socio-economical factors) about socio-material reality in relation to the zombie underspecified. The zombie apocalypse legitimises a response to the monstrous hordes of 'Others' by relying on 'logical' selfishness and violence. Such tendencies to assert politically who can be saved and who must die can be observed in, for example, how news media has reported on the Ebola virus outbreak and on refugees crossing the Mediterranean sea. These characteristics are summarised in Table 1, below.

The Zombie	Dimension	The Unknown
Visible; transparent; exhausted	Visuality	Hidden; opaque; entangled
Comfort in knowing; certainty; reassurance	Confidence	Discomfort in not knowing; uncertainty; disorientation
Familiar and Othered	Socio-emotional relationship	Strange and uncharted
Stabilises delimitation; supports identification	Delineation	Destabilises delimitation; supports anonymity
Reactive	Initiative	Proactive
Reinforces the desire to go back — 'things have gone too far'; conservative; old guard	Temporality	Reinforces the desire to go forward, towards the 'not-yet'; unfixed in time/space
A clear threat to humanity; horror; apocalypse	Anticipation	A potential good; hopefulness; a different future is possible
Simple; reductionist	Materiality	Complex; holistic

Table 1. A structural comparison of the zombie (a familiar monster) and the unknown

Theoretically and practically, we should therefore aim at retaining conceptual fogginess rather than trying to condense the existing nexus of signification surrounding the zombie into the shape of a familiar monster. As soon as the monster emerges from the fog, a false sense of relief and security enters. This relief can be problematic since it is also a reduction of complexity, which erases nuances in favour of a more rigid norm. In this sense, the zombie is reactive (not proactive) — it does not allow for an imagined future where anything else is

possible. Rather, the zombie is an example of how we could imagine anything (the choice of metaphors being infinite), but fail (as the choice lands on a very limited metaphor). Everything that does not fit the zombie metaphor is tidied away (as too complex, as obstructing desires, as impeding individual agency, and so on). A telling example of this would be the tension between the desire for outdoor activities (camping, hunting) as a solution to the zombie threat, and the possibility of nature itself being a threat (since the rules stipulate that the virus can only ever be spread through contact with zombies themselves and not through other 'natural' paths). In this example, nature posing a threat would render impossible the implied necessity of preparing to go out in the wild, and is therefore seen as an infraction of the rules. The specification of the zombie supports the present hegemony of the monster. That is, if we reduce the semantic and figurative potential of the zombie to nothing more than a metaphor for specific power structures and attitudes towards Otherness, we will only perpetuate power differentials in the future. A truly subversive monster, then, must be a not-yet and an unknown.

As such, this article extends the idea that the zombie can be recuperated, that this familiar threat can be rendered unfamiliar; doing so would mean that it would represent 'the ultimate uncanny'.[35] In the courses and guidelines discussed in this article, the zombie becomes knowable and killable, more a comfort than a threat. However, our model proposes that the previously estranged zombie (the zombie as something mystical and unknown) has taken a turn towards the familiar again by being a thoroughly exhausted metaphor which we, through pop culture, know more and more about. The ultimate uncanny is now instead the unknown, broadly conceived, and the transparent and simple rules that have been attached to zombies exist in culture primarily in order to obscure complex substructures. Both the monster and the unknown spring from a lack of knowledge, but the zombie has been recovered from the unsettling unknown and brought into a realm of ubiquitous comfortable transparency, where its rules are being codified. Furthermore, as this article illustrates, by bringing something out of the unknown and into the realm of the familiar, the comfort of transparency initiates Othering processes. Therefore, we argue that the unknown is a better metaphor for the unsettling, destabilising, and unknown/obscure aspects of the future.

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[35] Angela M. Cirucci, 'The Social Dead: How Our Zombie Baggage Threatens to Drag Us into the Crypts of Our Past', in *Thinking Dead: What the Zombie Apocalypse Means*, ed. by Murali Balaji (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 17-28.

Conclusion: Embracing the Unknown?

The monster as presented in the zombie folk model cements rules that support individual competition. In fact, we could argue that the continued interest in including inequality in figurations used for preparing for the apocalypse is a question of organising the future so that it supports the already-successful segments of society even after total disruption occurs. As Joan Acker asserts,

> In a culture that glorifies individual material success and applauds extreme competitive behavior in pursuit of success, inequality becomes a sign of success for those who win.[36]

This passage expresses much of the spirit in the texts we have examined in this article. We are witnessing a consistent return of the comfortable transparency of the zombie, which, once identified, legitimises Othering and violence, as Acker's assertion implies. The arbitrary yet specific rules of the zombie lures us into thinking that the apocalypse will be easy to spot (and its foot-soldiers distinguishable from ourselves); and curable only by killing every Othered individual that exists (by violence or passive isolation). Even though reconfigurations of the zombie and its attendant rules have been displayed in a number of recent films and television programmes, these examples only represent a need to *re-introduce* the already Other(ed) as an (almost) equal — 'look, the zombie *can* be our friend' (although still essentially Othered). The zombie apocalypse is therefore a fictitious future limited by its main source of figuration. The comfortable transparency of the zombie cannot be a disruptive figuration because it does not 'resist representation, resist literal figuration [or] erupt in powerful new tropes, new figures of speech, new turns of historical possibility'.[37] In short, zombies do not deliver on the promise of monsters (to unsettle discourses). Instead, they legitimise and conserve the current unequal regime (and even dictate who deserves to survive and who does not). Moving towards the in-between space of monstrosity and the unknown not-yet will open the zombie metaphor up to truly 'troubling' ways of becoming and 'reset the stage for possible pasts and futures' — preferably in much more cooperative and creative ways than those engendered by the threat of the zombie at present.[38] Ideally, the entangled mess of the unknown, the insecure, the anywhere, is the future that we should prepare for.

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[36] Joan Acker, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations', *Gender & Society*, 20 (2006), 441-64 (p. 459).

[37] Haraway, 'Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape', in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. by J. Butler and J. W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 86-100 (p. 86).

[38] Haraway, p. 86.