…of the Dead:
The Rhizombie, An Indigenous-Informed Approach to Contagion

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki,
the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
We are all Treaty people.

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ABSTRACT

Contagion increasingly overlays other social concerns infecting our world, such as racial oppression and climate crises, and thus threatens to render all other issues invisible. This project, however, argues that contagion is interconnected with these other issues in complex entanglements. I call these entanglements the "rhizombie," which is informed by a combination of Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari's rhizome, Donna Haraway's multispecies work, and the Mi'kmaq concept of *Netukulimk*. Each of these methodologies propose a multiplicity, but they differ in when, where, how, and with whom their multiplicities manifest. Zombie narratives in the twenty-first century have evolved to reflect a need for multiplicity thinking because the zombie's body exploded to include Indigenous zombies, South Korean zombies, and ecological zombies, just to name a few. The combination of increased globalization, increased diversity in horror, and the inability to differentiate when and where one contemporary issue begins or ends results in the zombie's body becoming rhizomatic. The rhizombie is thus not simply the zombie as an allegory of singular, individual threats, in the manner that the figure of the zombie has been so well used and analysed since they first shuffled into our narratives (as, for example, an allegory for contagion, capitalism, climate change, consumption, or systems of racialized oppression). Understanding the zombie as rhizomatic highlights the figure as an embodiment of the complex entanglements of all of these threats and more and how they feed on and reproduce each other: threats of the past, present, and future; biological threats that are human, animal, plant, and pathogen; social threats of racial oppression, colonialism, political paranoia, and terrorism; anthropocentric threats of viruses and climate crises. The rhizombie exists in the interplay of all of these and more, a multiplicity of metaphors shuffling—and sometimes galloping—as both individuals and herds (or hordes).

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For Gampy.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Infodemic:

A Poetics of the Rhizombie

> *I felt a kind of deadly calm acceptance at the start of the pandemic, an uncanny sense of familiarity.*
> (Jennifer Cooke, qtd. in Canavan et al.)

> *"Earth never remained stable for long*."
> ("The Rules of Life")

In late 2020, an image of an abandoned hospital room with blurred portions that appear to be covering up blood-soaked items went viral (see fig. 1). It appears as if it came from CNN "Breaking News," live out of Los Angeles. The byline reads, "Hospitals on lockdown as first COVID-19 vaccine patients start eating other patients" (Haarisbeg), suggesting that those who get the vaccine are transforming into zombie-like creatures. The image was initially posted, however, on February 14, 2019, in the opinion section of the *New York Times*, and it was taken by medical school student Eric Curran on September 11, 2018[1] at the Temple University hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania after doctors failed to resuscitate a victim of gun violence. Curran began photographing operating rooms after failed resuscitation efforts "out of helplessness and despair" for the victims of "senseless" gun-related deaths (Curran), so not only does this image predate the global spread of COVID-19, but it also has nothing to do with contagion or zombies more generally.

Figure 1: The modified version of Eric Curran's photograph; *Business Today*, 2020.

[1] Zombie narratives proliferated in response to 9/11, and while Curran's image is not explicitly associated with 9/11, it is worth noting the coincidence that the original image was photographed on its anniversary—a date that is commemorated annually. See, Bishop, *How Zombies Conquered Popular Culture*; Dendle; Lauro, "New Life for the Undead"; Stratton; Vint.

So, what is this image doing, and why appropriate such an image to spread "fake news" about the COVID-19 vaccine turning its patients into zombies? In response to the release of COVID-19 vaccines, "fake news"[2]—that is, misinformation and disinformation perpetuated by both established and social media—immediately followed.[3] Those spreading mis- and disinformation about vaccine-related zombies claimed that the short-term and long-term effects of the vaccine were unknown, and thus the body of the monster becomes a prime location to play out these anxieties. For example, Markian Hawryluk reports that Coloradan John Letson was originally against the vaccine, highlighting *I Am Legend* and *Children of Men* as examples of what could go wrong, before finally getting his first dose (Hawryluk). Letson was not an isolated example: the use of films as reasons to avoid vaccination against COVID-19 spread across social media (Ufheil; Walsh). However, the same media that uses *I Am Legend* as an "anti-vaxxer" source also provides misinformation about other aspects of the film. In addition to mislabelling the monsters as zombies instead of vampires, the media also overlooks the fact that in the film, it is not a vaccine that causes the outbreak (Ufheil), but a virus that has been genetically re-engineered to cure cancer (Rao). The fact that those who share misinformation about the film are also those who draw on the film as a source for justifying anti-vaxx agendas, undermines both the validity and reliability of their argument. The COVID-19 vaccine will not cause a zombie outbreak, but what narratives dealing with vaccine-related zombiism expose are the fears and anxieties that lead to anti-vaxxers, vaccine hesitancy, and the spread of "fake news" more generally.

In addition to their bodies being perfectly primed for metaphors of contagion, zombies are emblematic icons of popular culture, meaning their proliferation demonstrates how well they have infected the American imaginary. As icons of popular culture, they affect

[2] While the term "fake news" proliferated and thus became popularized during the Trump administration, it was in use long before then. It first came into use in 1890 in an issue of Wisconsin's *Daily Journal* in reference to "the mine story" (further evidence of this story could not be found) (*OED*). Since then, it has been employed primarily by media in the United States in references to communism (*OED*). In its contemporary usage, "Fake news" refers to "inaccurate stories circulated on social media and the internet, esp. ones which serve a particular political or ideological purpose; or to seek to discredit media reports regarded as partisan or untrustworthy" (*OED*).

[3] According to the 2022 Royal Society of Canada (RSC) Policy Briefing, disinformation is "faulty information that is distributed to deceive or manipulate" (Wright et al. 3) and misinformation is "faulty information that is shared without an apparent intent to deceive or manipulate" (Wright et al. 3). I employ both terms here because it is impossible to determine the intent of the distributors in many of the cases shared throughout this introduction.

and are affected by the real world. According to Sara Polak, "many cultural objects that are (or dovetail on) popular culture are worth studying because of their very triviality, through which they 'give away' something about the culture in which they exist" (44). There are literally dozens of books and hundreds of academic articles that address the zombie, so why do we need another one? The majority of these books and articles focus primarily on either an historical overview of the monster or a single material or metaphoric quality it has embodied throughout its nearly hundred-year history. Despite "the ubiquity of the metaphor" (Lauro and Embry 395), I have yet to find a publication that addresses its various entanglements, placing its material and multi-metaphorical qualities in dialogue. The closest is Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry's "A Zombie Manifesto." Lauro and Embry put forth the "*zombii*, a consciousless being that is a swarm organism and the only imaginable specter that could really be posthuman" (396). The "zombii" "cannot be divided into parts constitutive of the categories it bridges" (Lauro and Embry 399) and is therefore a collapse between subject and object, resulting in "a paradox that disrupts the entire system" of categorization (Lauro and Embry 400). The "zombii" begins to sound like it is potentially rhizomatic, but then Lauro and Embry go on to state that 1) it is not a multiplicity (400), and 2) it destroys the individual (401) as it "embrac[es] a singular, swarm experience" (407). My study, by comparison, maintains the individual within a multiplicity—in other words, it simultaneously represents individual subject stories and places them within a larger dialectic, resulting in something I call the "rhizombie."

For example, in Chapter 4, Pandemic, I discuss Ellie from Neil Druckman's 2013 video game *The Last of Us*, who is infected with the zombie fungal pathogen, or what I call, "Lichenthropy," but the infection makes her immune, so she exhibits no signifiers of zombiism. Similarly, Chapter 3: Epidemic addresses the Indigenous survivors of the zombie pathogen in *Blood Quantum*, who are also immune. The only signifiers of zombiism that mark the bodies of the Indigenous characters are bites. Their immunity is entangled with their Indigeneity and possibly arises from contact with the settler Other, thereby requiring a balance in Indigenous-settler relations. In Chapter 5: Endemic, Melanie from *The Girl with All the Gifts* represents the generation born amidst the zombie pandemic, those who are simultaneously zombie and child but only sometimes present as monsters (trying to eat the other survivors, for instance) and sometimes present as children (with all the desires and

curiosity non-zombie children exhibit). In each of these narratives, the individual subjecthood of the infected is not effaced by the zombie pathogen but, rather, co-exists with it in complex entanglements. They transform one another. They are rhizomatic.

The rise in zombie narratives associated with both contagion and its repression—including the narratives of "fake news" and of popular culture and Gothic culture more generally—can be tied to a number of causes, but as noted above there is a clear link not just to the fears surrounding viral contagion, but also to the fears of treatments. These latter fears are due to the fact that government mandated treatments are represented as "rushed," and are tied to other measures that restrict choice and agency. My dissertation argues that the zombie therefore becomes not merely an embodiment of these fears but also a metaphor for understanding outbreaks, epidemics, pandemics, and endemics more broadly. To capture all of these viral concerns—the mis/disinformation that snowballs into the "infodemic"; the individual ideological fears that inform the culture of fear; and the interrelations between these—I propose that we read the zombie of contemporary narratives as the "rhizombie."

The rhizombie is informed by a combination of Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari's rhizome, Donna Haraway's multispecies work, and the Mi'kmaq concept of *Netukulimk*, each of which I discuss in detail later in this Introduction. Each of these methodologies are similar in that they propose multiplicity, but they differ in when, where, how, and with whom their multiplicities manifest. Zombie narratives have evolved to reflect a need for multiplicity thinking. Between 1929 and 1968, the Haitian zombie clearly dominated the American imaginary; between 1968 and 2000, it was the modern zombie; from 2001 onward, the viral zombie and the sentient zombie became prolific. However, from about a decade into the twenty-first century, the zombie's body exploded to include Indigenous zombies, South Korean zombies, ecological zombies, and an increased abundance of zombie children, just to name a few. The combination of increased globalization, increased diversity in horror, and the inability to differentiate when one contemporary issue begins or ends results in the zombie's body becoming rhizomatic.

The rhizombie is thus not simply the zombie as an allegory of singular, individual threats, in the manner that the figure of the zombie has been so well used and analysed since they first shuffled into our narratives (as, for example, an allegory for contagion, capitalism,

climate change, consumption, or systems of racialized oppression).[4] These are all accurate and essential readings, but understanding the zombie as rhizombie allows us to recognize in the figure an embodiment of the complex entanglements of all of these threats and more, and how they feed on and in turn reproduce each other: threats of the past, present, and future; biological threats that are human, animal, plant, and pathogen; social threats of racial oppression, colonialism, political paranoia, and terrorism; anthropocentric threats of viruses and climate crises. The rhizombie exists in the interplay of all of these and more, a multiplicity of metaphors shuffling—and sometimes galloping—as both individuals and herds (or hordes). What remains of this introduction elaborates on my development of the rhizombie: first, by discussing the "infodemic" and the "culture of fear," especially as those relate to COVID-19 and other contagions and related panics; second, by exploring how the rhizombie allows us to read the history and poetics of the zombie narrative differently; and finally, by looking forward to the ways I explore the zombie's rhizomatic possibilities in each of my individual chapters.

Infodemic: Viral Images and the "Culture of Fear"

A cutscene from the last episode of *The Walking Dead: World Beyond* (2020-21) reveals that the Wildfire Virus—the name of the virus that leads to the zombie pathogen—may have originated in a lab in France called "*la Biomédicine*" where doctors were experimenting with something that is never revealed to the audience ("The Last Light"). Kirsten Acuna argues that *la Biomédicine* echoes l'Agence de la Biomédicene, "the real-life government office, located in Saint-Denis, France, [that] oversees organ and tissue transplantation, stem-cell harvesting and transplantation, medically assisted procreation, and human embryology and genetics."[5] The use of a real-world medical lab suggests, in a manner similar to Curran's photograph, that there is something about *la Biomédicine* that inspires the creation of zombies. The discussion of the lab in the television show is also the first time the audience gets a glimpse of "variant cohorts" ("The Last Light"), the faster and stronger

[4] For more information on the zombie as allegory, see, Larsen; McAllister; Shaviro; Sigurdson.

[5] See, https://www.agence-biomedecine.fr/?lang=fr.

zombies that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5. This scene further suggests that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta already knew about the virus as they were sharing data with the French lab; the scene shows an old video of American virologist Dr. Edwin Jenner complimenting the French lab's attempts to end the zombie pathogen: "using cardiac plaques as a host medium for steroidal therapies to jumpstart the circulatory system in hopes of short-circuiting the brain or perhaps regaining function to cause nerve confusion" ("The Last Light"). The use of medical jargon achieves three things here: firstly, it establishes Dr. Jenner as a medical expert, increasing his reliability as a representative of the field; but, secondly, it creates a zone of exclusion or a communications gap whereby those viewers who are unfamiliar with this medical jargon are left unsure of exactly what kinds of medical experiments are taking place in this lab, thereby possibly increasing fears and anxieties surrounding unchecked medical treatments; and, thirdly, it collapses the fictionalisation of the zombie narrative into the real-world. In this manner, Dr. Jenner's statement on "cardiac plaques"[6] might equate to zombies for those who do not understand what he's saying, so that "cardiac plaques" in the real-world medical industry become a source of zombie-related fear to the general public, and it is the misinterpretation that potentially proliferates more commonly than the medical discourse itself. Simply put, zombies precede contemporary medical discourse in the public imaginary.

Similarly, the opening scene of *28 Days Later* (2004) takes place in a lab where animal rights activists, who are trying to free monkeys, ignore warnings about the animals being infected with the Rage virus—the source of the zombie pathogen in this film as well as *28 Weeks Later* (2007). While the activists seem to have good intentions regarding the welfare of the animals being experimented on, their lack of epidemiological understanding regarding what is happening in the lab, combined with their unwillingness to listen to the doctor who attempts to warn them multiple times, inadvertently results in the release of the virus. Scientists and failed science experiments are a staple of the zombie narrative, as is such a communications gap, but the gap can arise from either medical jargon or from a conflict of ethics or from a lack of trust in medical "experts." In this film, the lack of communication between the scientists and the animal rights activists leads to the zombie outbreak that overtakes Britain. As such, although the use of medical jargon and scientific

[6] Cardiac plaques are cholesterol deposits that can causes coronary artery disease.

laboratories increases the ability for zombie narratives to speak to contemporary fears of unchecked or rushed medical treatments, it also makes it easier for anti-vaxxers and those living with vaccine hesitancy to harness these narratives in support of their own ideologies.

A third example appears in the *Newsflesh* zombieverse, created by Mira Grant (the pseudonym of Seanan McGuire). Consisting of *Feed* (2010), *Deadline* (2011), *Blackout* (2012), *Rise* (2016), and *Feedback* (2016), the *Newsflesh* zombieverse features the Kellis-Amberlee virus, arising from an accidental cross between two human-made vaccines: one for cancer and one for the common cold. Grant refers to her zombieverse as "medical science fiction" (qtd. in "How Seanan McGuire Perfected Her Fictional Zombie Virus"), and she states in an interview with *Wired* that she "read enough books on viruses to qualify for some kind of horrible extra-credit program, audited a bunch of courses at UC Berkeley and at the California Academy of Sciences, and then started phoning the CDC persistently and asking them horrible questions" (qtd. in "How Seanan"). It was only after one CDC individual told her "don't…don't do that," after she had outlined how the Kellis-Amberlee virus would be created, that she believed she "had a viable virus" (qtd. in "How Seanan"). Kellis-Amberlee is a "chimera virus" consisting of a "filovirus" related to Ebola and a "genetically engineered coronavirus" ("How Seanan")—two viruses that have recently resulted in outbreaks in the real-world and are entangled with the zombie as metaphor, misinformation, and fear.

Even though Grant's zombie series existed long before COVID-19, the reference to coronavirus reveals it to be part of the same viral family that resulted in COVID-19. Additionally, the use of two vaccines to create Kellis-Amberlee compounds the relationship between vaccines and the rise of zombies in these narratives. The *Newsflesh* works—as the collective name for their fictional world indicates—highlight how easy it is for narratives of the "viral" zombie to connect to material concerns related to viruses and vaccines in the real world, and to the mis/disinformation around them—how the "news" is made "flesh" in other words. In her interview with *Wired*, Grant makes this clear, sharing that she is pro-quarantine: "Nobody comprehends quarantine, and absolutely nobody comprehends the fact that sometimes your 'rights' and 'liberties' do not have any place in the conversation" (qtd. in "How Seanan"). She draws on two examples to support her pro-quarantine stance: real-world cases of individuals with drug-resistant tuberculosis who resist quarantine and thus contribute to the spread of the disease, and the protagonists is *The Crazies* whose succeed in

breaking out of the quarantine zone at the end of the film (qtd. in "How Seanan"). Grant admits that she was most likely the only person in the audience cheering for the government instead of the protagonists in *The Crazies* (qtd. in "How Seanan"), highlighting how an abundance of medical knowledge often puts one at odds with the general public. In her pro-quarantine stance, Grant must draw on both real-world and fictional examples, the latter of which features a zombie-like pathogen. Grant's desire to become fully immersed in the epidemiology of viruses, including her education, her desire for Kellis-Amberlee to be believable, and her use of jargon can potentially make it difficult for the average reader to fully comprehend Kellis-Amberlee or the governmental regulations, such as quarantine, that are put in place in the novel.

Before COVID-19, one of the real-world viruses often associated with zombies was Ebola. As Grant was writing the series in 2014, the Ebola scare in America emerged, and similar to COVID-19, it was entangled in the zombie metaphor. Ebola outbreaks or concerns of laboratory leaks have occurred across Africa as well as in Europe and North America since the first recorded outbreaks in 1976, but in 2014, there were a few cases in the United States that led to a significant governmental response (Polak 41-2). The 2014 outbreak was also immediately met—within hours—with zombie-related misinformation: an image of a Black man with glazed over eyes whose face was covered in sores went viral (see fig. 2; Goodman). News of the "Ebola zombie" was originally shared by a satirical site, *Big American News*, claiming to be coming from Ganta, Liberia (Goodman). Abe Goodman, who wrote the article, satirically claims this to be "confirmed footage" of the third Ebola victim to rise from the dead and that the victim's name has not been released. The image is actually a composite of a screengrab from the 2013 zombie film, *World War Z*, combined with a mask (Glick 142). While this image launched the Ebola zombie into

Figure 2: The "Ebola Zombie"; *Big American News*, 2014.

mainstream media, it was not an isolated incident, nor were such stories limited to satirical websites. Most news sites took the angle of debunking the story, but India.com, which self-proclaims to be "one of the fastest-growing internet companies in India" that "promises to deliver truth, and nothing less" ("About Us"), shared the story as well as the image of the mask from the composite (Rajani). Other stories about Ebola zombies emerged (Eleftheriou-Smith). In China, for example, Xinhua News Agency—the official state-run news agency for the People's Republic of China—felt the need to issue a statement debunking the rumour that Ebola would turn its victims into zombies (Izadi) when Chinese netizens began calling it the "zombie disease" (Allen-Ebrahimian).[7] The same year that the Ebola scare took place in America, Marilyn Peake released the first novel in her *Mutation Z* series, called *The Ebola Zombies*, and the following year, a low-budget film called *Ebola Zombies* was released in Hong-Kong. Julia Belluz argues, "Ebola fear and conspiracy theories are spreading faster than the disease." So, whereas Ebola zombies are not real, the events leading to these stories are not entirely fake. Reports and video footage from "reputable sources" reveal Ebola victims seemingly coming back to life, but what was happening was that some victims were mispronounced dead in the rush to dispose of their contagious bodies, so to onlookers, it appeared as if they were rising from the dead (Glick 142-3).

When discussing how stories of the "Ebola zombie" became viral, Megan H. Glick asserts that in "'zombie stories,' those mistaken-for-dead become, in a sense, always already deceased," and this then develops into a "condition of [their] virality," which she calls "postmortem virality" (143). According to Glick, Ebola victims suffer from "unusual symptoms," such as internal liquification and the leaking of bodily fluid, which "render it [the virus and the Ebola body] most contagious *after* claiming its victim's life" (144), not unlike a zombie. As such, Ebola victims "are always already 'zombic forms'—bodies possessed by an infection promising to outlive them, forms of liveliness that depend upon their proximity to death" (Glick 144). Consequently, the zombie overlays the living being as subject, ensuring that both the living being as well as future victims of the Ebola virus are

[7] The original statement issued by the Xinhua News Agency not only claims that Ebola cannot turn those it infects into zombies, but it claims that this rumour does not exist: "it has never been said that people infected with Ebola will turn into zombies to attack people, which can only happen in movies" (Xinhuanet), pointing to a denial of misinformation and disinformation more broadly.

implicated in its entanglement. The result is that the Ebola body is a composite of the zombie as material as well as the zombie as metaphor, or the rhizombie.

A similar incident of "postmortem virality" occurs in Grant's first novel, *Feed*, where the group of protagonists—Georgia, Shaun, and Georgette, a.k.a Buffy—are mispronounced dead by the CDC following an attack on their convoy (399). All it took was an anonymous phone call to the CDC immediately after the accident for the government organization to take action: "Under the strict interpretation of the law, the CDC would have been within its rights to come into the valley, shoot us, sterilize the surrounding area, and deal with our remains. The fact that it took us alive for extensive testing was unusual, because it represented an unnecessary risk on its part" (Grant 399). In Grant's world, all characters are infected with Kellis-Amberlee (the zombie pathogen) from the moment they are born, so the virality of the characters' bodies—as always already infected—means that they are the legal property of the CDC, and the conditions of their potential deaths precede their lives. This becomes a form of biopolitics where bodies that are always already infected, such as those in Grant's zombieverse and *The Walking Dead* universe, are implicated in a "postmortem virality," and therefore represent a threat that is ever present, so they never really have any "rights." Essentially, because the immediate threats of Ebola, in 2014, and the zombie pathogen, in Grant's novel, takes precedent, any and all other possible threats or concerns are ignored.

It is this oversight that results in the proliferation of zombie metaphors that characterize the "infodemic." According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "An infodemic is too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak" ("Infodemic"). The WHO goes on to note that an "infodemic" "leads to mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health response," which can "intensify or lengthen outbreaks" ("Infodemic"). As such, an "infodemic" can spread just as fast as the disease it takes up and even exacerbate the disease itself, as we saw with Ebola. However, I want to challenge the kind of cause-effect relationship that the WHO is putting forward; rather than the "infodemic" leading to mistrust, I want to posit that the mistrust is already present and thus contributes to the "infodemic." In response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak, for instance, Joshua M. Sharfstein argues, "Fear during epidemics is based in distrust. People are quick to doubt experts, they criticize health officials for any perceived mistake, and they wonder aloud why more attention is not being paid to

worst-case scenarios." Sharfstein suggests that distrust is already present, and "Distrust unsettles and contributes to fear. Fear can lead to panic, as well as to discrimination, scapegoating, and even violence." Like COVID-19, the Ebola epidemic resulted in a rise of zombie references in the media (Burger 22-3). Consequently, zombies are not just a tongue-in-cheek humorous reaction to contagion, nor are they simply a vessel for misinformation, they are "a ready-made metaphor" for understanding fear and how it "leads to discrimination, scapegoating, and violence" as Sharfstein points out: "The word *zombie* triggers a frame for understanding, in which state and society have broken down" (Burger 23). When faced with fear, Burger believes that zombies provide us "vernacular" and "discourse" for understanding worlds of contagion. Similarly, Ashley Knox notes how the "pandemic language" of COVID-19, such as "rapid antigen testing" was entirely new for most people, but for fans of zombie narratives, it felt familiar (qtd. in Ufheil).

Jessecae K. Marsh, Nick D. Ungson, and Dominic J. Packer address the COVID-19/zombie entanglement from a categorical perspective, arguing that people who are faced with something—especially something new—can only understand it through the ways in which it shares qualities and behaviours with their existing categorical understandings. Thus, an image of a hospital room soaked in blood, when decoupled from its frame of reference relating to gun violence, may appear similar to the vernacular and discourse of, for example, Robert Kirkman's television adaptation of *The Walking Dead* comic series. The pilot episode of that series opens in a pre-outbreak world where protagonist Rick, a Sherriff's Deputy, is shot. He wakes up from a coma in a hospital after the zombie outbreak, and must, like the audience, navigate this new world without any explanations or frame of reference for the zombie outbreak. Interestingly, having just survived gun violence, Rick might approach the hospital as if more gun violence has recently occurred. While walking through the abandoned hallways, he encounters a wall covered in blood with what appear to be bullet holes (see fig.

Figure 3: A screengrab from the hospital scene in *The Walking Dead* episode 1.1, 2010.

3), and when the camera pans down, there are blood-soaked items and smears across the floor (see fig. 4). The hospital in this opening scene thus shares signifiers with Curran's photograph. Likening the COVID-19 pandemic to a zombie outbreak becomes categorically easier if one has never experienced a real-life pandemic—or gun violence—firsthand.

For example, "Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic" was released by the CDC just a few years prior to the "Ebola zombie" incident. "Preparedness 101" is a campaign that initially consisted of a blog, which was "retired" in 2021 in response to COVID-19, and a graphic novel,[8] both of which drew on the metaphor of the zombie to teach Americans about prepping for earthquakes and hurricanes (Collier-Jarvis "The CDC"). Sara Polak points out that while the "Ebola zombie" and "Preparedness 101" are seemingly disparate, "they are eerily linked" (42). This linkage occurs because both the CDC and the "Ebola zombie" "allow for fantasies of zombification […] to bleed over into racial panic about infestation and infection by the other" (Polak 42). After all, it is a Black body with dreadlocks that was chosen for the "Ebola zombie," and according to Polak, "the cultural type of the zombie" reframes American understandings of and therefore the responses to contagion (42). In Chapter 2, I detail the history of the Haitian zombie, which is considered to be the predecessor of the modern zombie, and how this early figure bleeds into contemporary culture, especially when read in the context of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter, and it seems that the "Ebola zombie" was part of a similar *modus operandi*. Polak explains how "Preparedness 101" did not, in fact, help mitigate fears of Ebola; instead, its depictions of West Africa fueled the agenda of the emerging Alt-Right movement in America (44). Instead of feeling prepared, the campaign perpetuated a "culture

Figure 4: A screengrab from the hospital scene in *The Walking Dead* episode 1.1, 2010.

[8] Despite the fact that the blog was one of the most visited websites when it was released, crashing the system (Good), and despite the fact that in 2021, visits to the website spiked again (Yuen), the CDC retired it in favour of something they considered more immediately relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic called "Prepare Your Health" (Collier-Jarvis "The CDC").

of fear" because it constructs the threat of the Black Other as a form of "postmorten virality" that is ever present.

This "culture of fear" does not appear from nowhere with either Ebola or COVID-19, of course; America was founded on a "culture of fear." Billy-Ray Belcourt, citing Leanne Simpson, highlights how the "colonial imaginary" of early settlement was "haunt[ed]" by a "fear of lawlessness" (23). As such, fear came into being amidst the very birth of America and therefore maintains colonial power through fear of the Other in American literature. The "culture of fear" is a "tactic, long abused by politicians" that renders citizens more susceptible to the initiatives proposed by their leaders (Changizi 167). It relies upon the "manipulation of our perception of risk and danger" (Changizi 168), so that the more attention paid to, as well as alarmist discourse constructed around, a potential threat, the more likely a "culture of fear" will come into being. According to Barry Glassner, some commonly used tactics include "repetition, misdirection, and treating isolated incidents and anecdotes as trends" (68), as in the case of the "Ebola zombie." Essentially, the "culture of fear" relies upon and contributes to the "infodemic." The "culture of fear" is most prominently wielded by right-wing politicians, such as Richard Nixon, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump; Nixon is credited with stating, "People react to fear, not love" (Glassner 68). While America's "culture of fear" was not new at the start of the twenty-first century, it infected the American imaginary in increasingly complex ways in response to 9/11 and the "war on terror." Walter Russell Mead refers to the years immediately following 9/11 as "the period of great fear, war fever, and intellectual paralysis" (1186). Mead's list of factors that inform Bush's use of the "culture of fear" entangles fear itself with the symptoms of contagion (fever) as well as the "infodemic" (intellectual paralysis). Similarly, David Ropeik provides a list of things Americans should be afraid of—"'Terrorism. Snipers. Child abductions. West Nile virus.'" (qtd. in Grow 57)—which Laura M. Grow refers to as being part of a "fear epidemic" (57). For these authors, each individual fear, punctuated matter-of-factly by Ropeik's use of periods instead of commas, is not *the* threat; instead, to risk cliché, fear itself is.

This "culture of fear" is prevalent in zombie narratives. In *Feed*, for example, Georgia explains,

> The people who have the power want you scared. They want you walking around paralyzed by the notion that you could die at any moment. There's always something to be afraid of. It used to be terrorists. Now it's zombies […] They like it when you're scared. So they do their best to sit on the truth, to sensationalize the truth, to filter the truth in ways that make it something you can be afraid of." (346)

Georgia's reference to "terrorists" places the zombie pathogen in the novel within the same "culture of fear" that has and continues to dominate post-9/11 discourse. Glassner similarly refers to terrorism as being "largely commensurate with the 'sick society' story" (68), and while Glassner's "sick society" is metaphorical, the reference to contagion overlaying society as a whole demonstrates how there is always something being constructed as *the* fear, even if that something poses very little to no risk at all. This is why the rhizombie is a necessary framework; it reveals how contagious overlays are largely palimpsest and that fear itself becomes a simulacrum.[9]

If fear is then constructed as contagion, then contagion becomes both material (Ebola, for example) and metaphorical. Glick, citing Ed Cohen, notes "that viruses incite anxiety because of their capacity to disrupt traditional visions of human embodiment" (143); they interrupt the illusory edges of the categorical human. The "culture of fear" does this as well. Tamsin Phillipa Paige argues that "heavy regulation of society in the name of safety creates a culture of fear that allows power to become distilled, and culturally sets up tragedy as normal rather than an outlier while setting up disproportionate laws to respond to these outlying tragedies" (132). Ultimately, the "culture of fear" is a form of contagion, and it is brandished by those in power to maintain disparities and power differentials. Within the discourse of the "culture of fear," oftentimes a single threat is drawn upon to maintain the fear in order to efface the "culture of fear" itself—to distract from the "real" issue, for lack of better wording. The rhizombie is the ideal for analyzing such a complex entanglement of fears because no single factor overlays another within it.

[9] Simulacrum, which is the singular of simulacra, is when the original referent becomes indistinguishable amidst its simulations According to Jean Baudrillard, "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – *precession of simulacra*" (453).

Unsurprisingly, given the "culture of fear," mainstream news media adopted discourse reminiscent of zombie apocalypses when discussing COVID-19. Josh Lyons compares COVID-19 to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, citing Revelations and stating, "the COVID-19 pandemic gallops on." The turn to the four horsemen is entangled with contagion as one of them represents pestilence—a fatal disease. Similarly, Simon Dein, working through various forms of apocalypticism, believes that "the Covid-19 pandemic has been viewed in apocalyptic terms signifying a radical societal change" (10). Mary McNamara, writing for the *Los Angeles Times* prior to the synthetization of a COVID-19 vaccine, turned to "Revelations" to try to understand not just the pandemic, but also racial injustice, American political upheaval, and the California wildfires that are also plaguing the world. Thus, the use of apocalyptic vernacular and discourse demonstrates how contagion is not siloed but is implicated in social structures more broadly; it often both embodies and overlays other issues and has the potential to transform them. James Crossley refers to the language of apocalypticism as "a shared language which helps convey the severity of the dangers posed to the world during the [COVID-19] pandemic" (101). In addition to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, McNamara also turned to J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Stephen King's *Under the Dome,* and *Sleepy Hollow* in her quest for making sense of the "fire tornado of grief and fear and fury" that characterized 2020. In turn, the discourse of this kind of categorical understanding, however fantastical, influences how one reacts to situations or images (Marsh et al.), such as a refusal to get a vaccine or encountering Curran's photograph on social media. In essence, McNamara was seeking a ready-made metaphor.

Burger notes, "More than a metaphor, the zombie label triggers an entire frame of understanding" (27). Thus, zombies and other apocalyptic scenarios found in literature and film are useful for "understanding the best laid schemes of pandemic and zombies can help us understand how people respond to emergent disease" (Marsh et al. 13), but they are also primed for fueling the "infodemic." Julia M. Wright notes that while the term "infodemic" is new, false and misleading information about outbreaks have been around for centuries. I would argue that each time an epidemic emerges, it is immediately followed by an "infodemic"—the two become entangled, and oftentimes it becomes difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins. Julia M. Wright argues that "Fictions that use viruses

are generally not about science, though. A virus creates story-telling opportunities for debates about ethics that give us key information about characters." As such, having a believable disease is not necessary, and while the "believability" associated with increased scientific and medical research on the part of authors and filmmakers increases the ability for these narratives to respond to contemporary fears and anxieties, it also contributes to the "infodemic." Julia M. Wright posits "that fact-checking may not be enough," but she suggests that stories have the power to transform misinformation. One way in which this might be possible is to sever the explicit links between the zombie and vaccines rooted too firmly in the science, which I do not necessarily recommend, but another might be to develop a more interconnected framework for understanding contagion, the zombie, the "culture of fear," and their myriad relationships—rhizombic entanglements. So, why do I begin here in the realm of real-world expletives of fictional monsters? Because it is here where contagion has both everything and yet absolutely nothing to do with zombies.

Making Meaning: A Poetics of the (Rhi)zombie

Like a rhizome, a "subterranean stem" (Deleuze and Guattari 6), the zombie rises from beneath the earth, but it did not begin there. This study does not concern itself with rigidly defining what a zombie is, since doing so could occupy a book all its own, and many have already taken up this task.[10] To simply define the parameters of narratives that are included in these pages, if a text or critical response to a text uses the term "zombie" or similar terms, such as "ghouls" and "walkers," and if a text pairs these various names with the qualities typically associated with the zombie figure—enslavement, rising from the grave, contagion, and consuming human flesh, just to name a few—then I deem it "zombie-enough" to have a place in this dissertation. My resistance to rigidly policing the borders of the zombie in an attempt to define it comes partly from the ever-shifting nature of the figure, partly from acknowledging culturally diverse approaches to the figure, and partly to highlight the importance of the rhizombie as open-ended, multifarious, and growing in multiple directions.

[10] See, for example, Bishop, *How Zombies*; Boon; Dendle; and Lauro and Embry.

Moreover, I am not concerned with providing a completely comprehensive, chronological, recounting of the history of the zombie; this too, has been done.[11] Instead, I am concerned with what a zombie does, and thus I briefly address parts of the zombie's history to contextualise the zombie's doing and being. Deleuze and Guattari argue that we should not ask what something "means, as signified or signifier" but instead, "what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other things multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own convergence" (4). The zombie, in all its forms, has been addressed as a meaning-making monster without much discussion of "what it functions with," and indeed, it is arguably the most meaning-making of monsters, but it has rarely been looked at as a material-multi-metaphor-meaning-making-monster that "transmits intensities" in various "multiplicities," and to that, I propose the rhizombie.[12]

The etymology of the term "zombie" is often debated (A. Anderson 2). Some contenders include the Kongolese term "*nzambi,*" meaning "spirit of a dead person" (McIntosh 2) or "god, fetish, or spirit" (A. Anderson 2-3), the Mitsogho term "*ndzumbi,*" meaning "the cadaver of the deceased" (McIntosh 2), the Angolian Kimbundu term "*nzúmbe*," meaning "spirit of a dead person" (W. Davis 12), and the Angolan term "*vumbi,*" meaning "ghost or spirit of the dead – which can enslave souls" (Lauro and Embry 105). Shawn McIntosh notes that regardless of which term is the zombie's predecessor, they all come from West Africa (2), which is unsurprising, since the zombie originated on the plantations in Haiti (Dendle 46) where many kidnapped West Africans were transported and enslaved. When the cultures and languages of West Africa transformed and blended with Haitian culture under the occupation of America, terms, such as "*zobi*" (Bishop *American Zombie Gothic,* 47) and "*zombi*" (Bishop *American,* 47), "*zumbi,*" meaning "a cadaver" (A. Anderson 3), and "*zonbi,*" meaning "without a soul" (A. Anderson 3), emerged. When the American author and explorer, William Seabrook, published his experiences in Haiti in the

[11] See, for example, Bishop, *American*; Dendle; Luckhurst; and McIntosh.

[12] In *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor*, Elizabeth Young argues that "The Frankenstein story has a long history of being used as a political metaphor, and at the start of the twenty-first century, it continues to shape political debate" (1). I agree with Young's assertion and maintain the zombie as arguably the most meaning-making of monsters, using Young's assertion to bolster my point. Frankenstein's creation can be considered to be one of the zombie's predecessors, sharing similar characteristics in terms of its relationship to death and resurrection.

travelogue *The Magic Island* (1929), he added the "e" to "*zombi*," resulting in the term that dominates today (A. Anderson 4). With the exception of *Dézafi* (1975), which uses the term "*zonbi*," because it is written in Haitian Creole, the narratives I address in this dissertation use "zombie" or synonymous terms that are unique to their respective narratives.

Thus, and as Chapter 2 addresses in greater detail, the earliest uses of the term "zombie," as well as figures embodying some of the qualities that are attributed to the zombie, appear in Haiti. The Haitian zombie dominated American narratives between 1929, with the publication of *The Magic Island*, and 1968 with the release of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*—the first depiction of the modern zombie of horror and Gothic film and literature. The Haitian zombie is typically represented as a body raised from the dead that is then used for forced labor in the fields of the plantation (Lauro and Embry 396). This representation is common in early films, such as Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932) and Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). The Haitian zombie is usually associated with negative depictions of voodoo/Vodou and thus embodies "imperialist paranoia" (Bishop *American*, 19). Chapter 2 argues that Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) is a Haitian zombie film. Because there is a dearth of Haitian zombie narratives after Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, the Haitian zombie has largely been surpassed in the American imaginary by Romero's zombie, but the inclusion of *Get Out* resurrects its influence to demonstrate how the enslavement of the Black body is not something of the past but has been reframed in new ways in the twenty-first century. While some critics discuss the modern zombie as a break away from the Haitian zombie, the rhizombie posits that all zombies are implicated in one way or another with their Haitian roots. Similarly, Anthony Anderson argues that the Haitian zombie "acts as a precursor to all that comes thereafter, every modification, every evolution is based upon this culturally promiscuous, undead colonial construct" (6). As such, Chapter 2 does not deal exclusively with the Haitian zombie, but addresses *Get Out*'s representation as a dialectic with the representation of Romero's modern zombie.[13]

The modern zombie of 1968 introduced American audiences to many of the qualities that continue to appear in zombie narratives today. Largely inspired by the vampires in

[13] *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) references the Haitian zombie briefly in a conversation between the survivors hiding out in the mall. Black character Peter admits that his grandfather was a *Makumba*/Voodoo priest in Trinidad, who "used to tell us, when there's no more room in hell, the dead will walk the Earth" (*Dawn of the Dead*).

Richard Matheson's novel, *I Am Legend* (McIntosh 8), Romero's zombies arise from the dead, are fearful of fire, consume flesh, and can only be killed by a blow to the head. When Romero transformed the zombie, he shifted it from being a material metaphor of enslavement to a multifaceted embodiment of a paranoid-fueled 1960s America. For instance, the film alludes to the idea that the potential cause of the zombies is radiation from the Venus space probe (*Night of the Living Dead*). After WWII, the United States and the Soviet Union found themselves in a technological battle working with V2 rocket-powered missiles in what has been called the "Space Race" (Hudak 20). The Space Race began so quickly, and it used technology previously employed by the Nazi regime, resulting in a rise in post-WWII anxiety (Boyle). Amy Teitel claims, "Americans descended into a state of complete hysteria." To make matters worse, the Cold War continued to ramp up, fueling nuclear anxiety, and American support for the Vietnam War was wavering, resulting in Richard Nixon's famous "great silent majority" speech where he appealed to the many Americans who were not speaking openly in support of the War. Nixon's turn of phrase conjures up images of Americans walking silently in droves across the landscape, which is exactly what Romero provides, and *Night of the Living Dead* has been addressed as a critique of Nixon's "silent majority" (Azevedo).[14] Whereas "Haitian peasants feared being removed from 'the many' […], modern audiences in industrialized society […] are afraid of losing their individuality and becoming one among 'the many'" (McIntosh 3). Because the official cause of zombies is never revealed in *Night of the Living Dead*, the film demonstrates how the "culture of fear" is about fear itself run rampant.

While Romero's zombies never wholly went out of fashion, they gave way to the viral zombie towards the end of the twentieth century. In 1983, zombies hit the height of their popularity with the release of Michael Jackson's "Thriller," but were immediately followed by a period of zombie "spoofs" (McIntosh 11). Romero's third film, *Day of the Dead* (1985) was unable to compete with the popularity of slasher films (McIntosh 11). Meanwhile, American media of the 1980s and 1990s became inundated with viral signifiers as magnified

[14] On November 3, 1969, President Richard M. Nixon stated, "to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans, I ask for your support" (13). Referring to "a large group of people in a country who do not express their opinions publicly but can sway elections" (Aleksic), Nixon popularized "silent majority" in his televised address to the American people when he sought support from the unspoken Americans for the Vietnam War (Campbell 70). It is a euphemism for the undead (Aleksic). In *Night of the Living Dead*, these two meanings come together.

photographs of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) proliferated (Wald 33). Throughout history, *Time Magazine* has traditionally featured a medium-close-up image of an influential human on its cover,[15] so the fact that it dedicated not one but four covers in the 1980s and two in the 1990s to the topic of HIV demonstrates a turn toward constructing viruses within not only the "culture of fear"—as "the growing threat" (see fig. 5)—but in positions of agency as demonstrated by the close-up image of HIV in a place formerly occupied by influential humans. Priscilla Wald claims that media coverage of "viruses as enemies and invaders" was "typical" during this time (33). Moreover, Wald points out how "Accounts of viruses frequently shared the page with another topic of particular interest: the allegedly emerging global threat of Communism" (34). As such, the turn toward viral discourse is rhizombic in that it is always interwoven with fear of the Other, such as the relationship between the queer body and AIDs or the relationship between the COVID-19 body and Asian people.

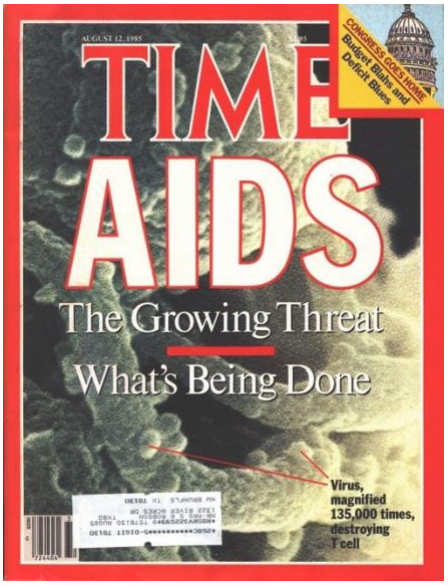

Figure 5: The cover of *Times Magazine*, 12 Aug. 1985.

In Chapter 3, I argue that Indigenous storytellers flip the virality associated with the Other. This chapter focuses on the Indigenous part of the rhizombie as a decolonial approach characterized by entanglements between contagion and racial oppression. Indigenous-made zombie narratives, such as *Blood Quantum*, use a technique coined by Theresa A. Goddu called "haunting back" to interrupt the virality of historical contagion. Ultimately, these narratives blend traditional Indigenous knowledge with contemporary zombies to unveil how the history of the ideology informing the national narratives of Turtle Island (North America) is predicated on Indigenous oppression. By haunting back, Indigenous storytellers unsettle these national narratives and respond to Billy-Ray Belcourt's experimental approach to decolonisation: "dreaming up worlds that can bear all of us, worlds that slip-slide into others without disavowing their hybrid alterities" (22), worlds populated by zombies. Too long

[15] I went through the vault of *Time Magazine* covers from 1925-85, and while after 1950 1-2 covers a year featured technology, other threats, or a political cartoon, it was not until 1985 that a virus appeared on the cover.

silenced by the not-so-"silent majority," Indigenous storytellers have much to contribute to the zombie subgenre. Chapter 3 addresses the various ways that Indigenous storytellers reassert land and language sovereignty over their oppression.

After 9/11, the zombie's virality blended with fears of terrorism and re-exploded in popularity, dominating the American imaginary, and resulting in what Kyle William Bishop calls "the Zombie Renaissance" (*American* 25). Chapter 4 discusses in detail the ways in which the less popular 1990s zombie incubated in the video game mode before finding new life, so to speak, in post-9/11 cinema and video games. Viral zombies more explicitly root the zombie pathogen in various forms of contagion because they are concerned with themes of "invasion" (Bishop *American*, 26)—whether that takes the form of an actual terrorist or a pathogen entering the body. The viral zombie is sometimes alive and sometimes fast as in narratives, such as *28 Days Later*. When discussing the post-9/11 viral zombies, Peter Dendle claims, "It is not homogeneity – not the levelling of individuality – that scares us anymore, then, if this image is read symptomatically: it is rather the lack of control, dignity, direction that scares us. The contemporary zombie embodies a wanton, unfettered pursuit of immediate physical cravings, a fear of raw power" (54).

The end of the twentieth century also became enamored with images of sympathetic zombies that resemble humans with metaphorical disabilities more than the monstrous attributes that characterize their predecessors. This is often called the "sentient zombie" (Heise-von der Lippe 71), the "sympathetic zombie" (Bishop *American*, 160), the "rehabilitated zombie" (Bruin-Molé and Polak 10), or the "zombie channel" (Boon 39). The sentient zombie can usually speak and move about the world like most humans but is still plagued by zombie qualities that hinder it, such as the hunger and decay experienced by the characters in *Warm Bodies* (2013), *In the Flesh* (2013-14), *iZombie* (2015-19), and *Santa Clarita Diet* (2017-19). According to Anya Heise-von der Lippe, sentient zombies represent the "posthumanist interrogation of humanist assertions of normality and stability" (71). They disrupt the categorical human. The zombie "underwent a transformation, appearing more frequently as a figure of sympathy, playfulness, even sexiness, as the world acclimated steadily to intensified globalisation" (Wald xvii). I do not address the sentient zombie directly nor do I use this or related terms throughout this study; however, I look at characters that have been addressed as sentient, such as Melanie from *The Girl with All the Gifts*, in

Chapter 5. These partial zombies embody the next step in multispecies entanglements with those that might be considered infected. I argue that they are an essential aspect of the endemic.

Chapter 5 focuses on the increase in zombie narratives that we might term endemic where the protagonists, such as those in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* trilogy (2009-2011), *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014; 2016), Mira Grant's *Newsflesh* series (2010-2016), and *The Walking Dead: World Beyond* (2020-21), are learning to live alongside contagion in new ways. This chapter argues that living with contagion is characterized by rhizomatic entanglements between contagion and climate change where characters must "embrace extinction," a concept put forth by Sarah E. McFarland. McFarland believes that characters should acknowledge "shared vulnerability" and "emphatic empathy" (838) regardless of whether they are human or zombie or some kind of hybrid between the two. This chapter takes up McFarland's call by addressing the rhizomatic possibilities within zombie narratives that draw attention to human extinction.

The zombie has thus changed many times throughout the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is because each form of cultural "contagion" is somewhat unique to its own time and calls for a different manifestation of the zombie. Therefore, "each outbreak has contributed to a larger contemporary obsession with metaphors and modalities of contagion" (Bruin-Molé and Polak 2), such as the zombie. What is important to note here, though, is that each outbreak does not erase or replace previous outbreaks; each pathogen, while not always epidemiologically related to one another, is implicated in the longer history and narrative of contagion through its relations with its hosts and how its hosts have learned from and adapted in response to each pathogen. This is the rhizombie—an entangled approach to contagion where various relationships between humans, animals, plants, and pathogens are always already implicated in the past, present, and future of one another, where "even the most trivial contagion fictions can return to shape new realities" (Bruin-Molé and Polak 6). The zombie returns because it has something more to say about the culture in which it arises, and it reminds us not to forget the past in the process. After all, if the call for contagion narratives existed within a silo, it would beckon some new monster into being rather than reawaken its old monsters. My Conclusion demonstrates the effects of this return by addressing the Frontier zombie in such zombie Western narratives as *Zombieland*

(2009) and *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022). The Frontier zombie suggests that a return to resettlement is a way of re-establishing the Manifest Destiny and power dynamics of the colonial West and thus maintaining the power dynamics of colonialism, while also critiquing the association between future and progress. However, this return to the West, as well as many critics' approaches to a tidy chronological history of the zombie, often overlooks underrepresented voices. In *Zombieland* and *Zombieland: Double Tap* (2019), for instance, there are several references to Indigenous peoples that explicitly highlight their absence. While these scenes may be read as contributions to the "vanishing Indian" trope, they take place well past the vanishing point, so instead, reading these absences as rhizomatic, I posit them as what Deleuze and Guattari might term "asignifying ruptures."

Reterritorialization: Rhizomatic Possibilities and Indigenous Thinking

The rhizombie thus points to anything and everything all at once. It grows both up and down, both toward and away from itself in the manner that the zombie figure has in recent years. A rhizome is "an underground interconnected root system. New plants pop up here and there along various points of the root system" (Butler et al. 129). Deleuze and Guattari build from this a theoretical concept, arguing that, "An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections," adding that "There are no points or positions in a rhizome" (8). In fact, "one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways" (Deleuze and Guattari 12). As such, the principles of the rhizome, according to Deleuze and Guattari, include connection and heterogeneity (7), multiplicity (8), asignfying rupture (9), cartography and decalcomania (12)—all of which are crucial figurations of the function of the zombie in the twenty-first century. Each chapter in this dissertation looks at various entanglements of the rhizombie in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's qualities of the rhizome.

Like a rhizome, the zombie "is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation" (Deleuze and Guatarri 12). In this manner, it never severs its cultural roots in Haiti, or even West Africa, but rather it grows out of these roots, and sometimes, as in *Get Out*, returns to them. This is a crucial quality of both the rhizome

and the zombie. Deleuze and Guattari suggest, "Go first to your old plant and watch carefully the watercourse made by the rain. By now the rain must have carried the seeds far away. Watch the crevices made by the runoff, and from them determine the direction of the flow. Then find the plant that is growing at the farthest point from your plant" (11). What Deleuze and Guattari refer to here is "asignifying semiotics" or the abstract and non-representation qualities that reproduce (capitalist) power relations (Bueno). Essentially, "asignifying semiotics" refers to the ways in which an absence of a representation still points to a signifier. The zombie's body, for instance, is simultaneously a signifier of contagion and an asignifier of climate change. They do not operate on their own but rather in various ways with signifying semiotics to reproduce power relations in what Deleuze and Guattari call "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" (10). All bodies, both those that are and are not infected, in zombie narratives undergo the processes of "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" in that their social relations become refigured by new worlds of contagion. In discussing "reterritorialization," Deleuze and Guattari claim that "We form a rhizome with our viruses, or rather our viruses cause us to form a rhizome with other animals" (10) because the transmission of viral cells carries with it other, asignifying cellular information the other infected bodies with which it has come into contact. This is one of the many ways that multiplicity functions in the zombie narratives I discuss here.

While Deleuze and Guattari provide the qualities of a multiplicity in the image of the rhizome, Haraway provides the possible uses for such multiplicities. The chapters in this dissertation are guided by Haraway's advice: "Staying with the trouble" or "making kin in the Chthulucene" (*Staying with the Trouble* 4). According to Haraway, "Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations" (*Staying* 4). This does not mean we necessarily develop solutions to climate crises or contagion. Rather, each of my chapters suggests a different method informed by Haraway's ideas in which survivors in zombie narratives might "stay with the trouble." In Chapter 2, I discuss how *Night of the Living Dead* and *Get Out* do not move away from what is known as the problematic "Black guy" trope, but instead operate within it to critique and transform it. In Chapter 3, the immunity of the Indigenous survivors suggests that they have been "making-with"—or what Haraway calls "sympoiesis" (*Staying* 5)—settlers, microbes, and the environment in new ways. In Chapter 4, the involvement of the

player in the narrative of video games suggests an opportunity to acknowledge what Haraway calls "response-ability" (*Staying* 98) for their role in environmental damage. Chapter 5 argues that living with contagion ultimately requires "becoming-with" viruses and other species, or what Haraway refers to as "terraforming" via "symanimagenic complexity" (*Staying* 154).

Finally, I refer to the rhizombie as an "Indigenous-informed" approach. What I mean by this is that my Indigenous ways of knowing and being shape how I engage with narratives and thus how I analyse the ways in which the multispecies within the rhizombie relate to one another. Specifically, I am guided by the principles of *Netukulimk*, or the Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and being that shape how we interact with all living and non-living things. Chapter 3 draws significantly on this concept as *Blood Quantum* was created by Mi'kmaq filmmaker, Jeff Barnaby. However, implicitly, *Netukulimk* informs my analysis in my other chapters as well. For instance, Chapter 5 proposes that post-COVID, endemic-based zombie narratives adopt a different discourse when discussing zombies; these narratives suggest that zombies are no longer monstrous invaders but are merely a different species that the human survivors are learning to live alongside;[16] they are a natural part of the evolutionary process as a result of extended exposure to contagion, similar to the immunity possessed by the characters in the narratives I discuss in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. *Netukulimk* calls for reciprocity, and I argue, this includes relationships with zombies.

Bruin-Molé and Polak believe that "Understanding these obsessions [contagion narratives] and their histories can help us to make sense of our current situation, and hopefully to recognize these patterns and prejudices more quickly in future moments of crisis" (2). The proliferation of contagion narratives as well as the critical attention these narratives attract reveals how our world is "increasingly interconnected" but simultaneously "alienating" (Wald xv). I insist that overlaying any issue too exclusively with contagion is detrimental because it ignores just how entangled contagion is with everything else in the world. Wald, for example, argues that "Racism, resource exhaustion, global poverty, environmental devastation, climate change: all, as the 1989 conference made clear, are interconnected as well as predisposing factors of pandemics" (xv). This is the "culture of fear." Bruin-Molé and Polak argue that "contagion narratives are not about disease at all, but

[16] There is a possibility in this approach becoming a method of reconciliation.

rather about the warring horrors and desires inherent in human and non-human embodiments, networks and contagion vectors in an increasingly risk-averse world, illustrating the 'power and danger of bodies in contact' in a globalized world" (8). These horrors/desires are what drives the "infodemic" characterized by Curran's bloody viral image, and they will continue to fuel everything that utters the term, "zombie." Thus, I set out to write this study because I was tired of the discarded single-use masks in the gutters; I sought to prove that contagion should never overlay other issues, and that, in fact, all other issues are entangled with contagion; the rhizombie is our only hope for the future.

CHAPTER 2

Outbreak:

"The Black Guy" and the Carceral Continuum

> *"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."*
> (*The Constitution of the United States*)

> *"We can't all die first."*
> (*The Blackening*)

Jordan Peele, the writer and director of the 2017 psychological thriller, *Get Out,* was influenced by the work of George A. Romero (Coyle). After Romero passed away, also in 2017, Peele posted an image on Twitter[17] of Black protagonist Ben from Romero's 1968 zombie film, *Night of the Living Dead,* with the accompanying message, "Romero started it" (see fig. 6; Peele). But, what exactly is "it"? As Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. notes, *Night of the Living Dead* is credited with many firsts: unlike their Haitian referents, the "ghouls" in Romero's film do not have a slave master (10)[18]; they eat flesh (10); monstrosity is transmitted via bite (12); and, while the film never pinpoints a single cause for the ghoul's existence, they are associated with scientific origins, such as radiation from the Venus space probe, as opposed to supernatural origins (11). While Peele does not elaborate on exactly what "it" is, the image of Ben that

Figure 6: Jordan Peele's Tweet about Romero, 16 July 2017.

[17] Twitter has since been renamed X.

[18] "Ghoul" is a vague term with a variety of meanings. Etymologically, it originated in early 18th century Arabic folklore, referring to "wandring [*sic*] demons" who inhabit "lonely or deserted place[s]," and who consume the flesh of humans (*OED*). Even though Romero does not use the term "zombie" in *Night of the Living Dead,* "zombie" appears in his other films, and the *Living Dead* franchise is credited with giving us the "modern zombie" (Bradshaw).

accompanies his tweet points to a different kind of first. Ben is considered to be the first Black protagonist in horror film (Russell). This "it" may be what influenced Peele's own filmmaking. Andy Crump believes that the two films "pair together perfectly regardless of age or differences in aesthetics and intentions"; they are "intertwined" and, "if you start off talking about one, you'll eventually find yourself talking about both," which is exactly why this chapter begins amidst such a rhizombie entanglement. Crump is not the only critic who begins with one film and ultimately ends up ensnared by the other. Camille Moore, Caitlin Duffy, David Gillota, and Amanda E. each begin by discussing one film and find themselves eventually drawing parallels between the two. But, why? Coming nearly fifty years after Ben and the modern zombie shuffled onto the big screen, *Get Out* shares much in common with *Night of the Living Dead* in terms of how the zombie is figured as a signifier of neo-slavery and what it means to be Black in America—in essence, both films reshape "the Black guy," a longstanding trope in American cinema.

In this chapter, I begin by offering a history of the trope of the "Black guy" in American film and its interrelations with the history of the zombie. I then turn to a comparison of the final scenes of *Get Out* and *Night of the Living Dead* to address how the representation of this trope in zombie narratives changed between 1968 and 2017. This chapter then shifts to look at the relationship between slavery and the rise of the Haitian zombie as well as how Romero's modern zombie is ultimately born from, instead of being a rejection of, its Haitian roots. In terms of Romero's oeuvre, the focus in this chapter is primarily on Romero's zombie franchise, including *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), and *Land of the Dead* (2005). While Romero's zombieverse also includes *Diary of the Dead* (2007), *Survival of the Dead* (2009), *The Living Dead* (2020), a novel published posthumously with Daniel Kraus, and the forthcoming *Twilight of the Dead*, these latter narratives do not necessarily respond to "the Black guy" trope.[19] This chapter argues that the moment the culturally constructed identity called "Blackness"—a necessary precursor to "the Black guy"—comes into being in American zombie narratives is paradoxically both a rejection of and a definitive example of a specific, racialized category. Frank B. Wilderson states that "Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks" (38). Similarly, Ryan Poll argues that the "African body" was remade into

[19] It is worth mentioning that *The Living Dead* novel features a strong Black female character.

"Black flesh" at the development of slavery (90), so somewhere on the ships travelling between the West African coast and the Eastern seaboard of North America, that moment of slavery's origin and continuation, Blackness was born, but the condition of slavery is also the moment in which tales of the zombie first emerged. Zombie narratives are therefore implicated in the rise (or production) of Blackness and by extension, "the Black guy" trope. The zombie narrative generally reveals how Black bodies are inscribed within what Loïc Wacquant calls the "carceral continuum"; the history of the zombie, like Blackness itself, is born out of transatlantic slavery and is thus coterminous with both the plantation as well as contagion—the first of many possible entanglements in the rhizombie.

"The Black Guy": The Rhizombie and the Rise of Anti-Black Stereotypes

Black bodies are inextricably entangled in the rhizombie and all its internodes,[20] and this entanglement manifests most prominently in "the Black guy" trope, which has and continues to undergo transformation—or "transmutation" as Peele might call it.[21] Whether it is Dick Halloran (Scatman Crothers) in *The Shining* (1980), Mr. Arnold (Samuel L. Jackson) in *Jurassic Park* (1993), or even Bubba (Mykelti Williamson) in *Forrest Gump* (1994), "the Black guy" is the token Black character that stands alone in a sea of white actors/characters. In discussing "token" Black characters, Ian Butt believes they "are boring, flat, and they always, repeat always, die quickly. It's so bad that the 'token black guy' in a horror movie has become a running gag akin to being a 'red shirt' in a Star Trek episode." According to Dave Monahan and Richard Barsam, flat characters possess few traits and do not exhibit much in the way of character development over the course of the film (113). More specifically, E.M. Forster, working through flat characters in literature, roots them in the

[20] Internodes are the parts of a stem of a rhizome from which new shoots grow upward but also where new roots grow downward (OED). In the rhizombie, internodes are the places where new embodiments of the zombie appear, such as the transmutated Black characters in *Get Out*, which are a new shoot that grow upwards but are also grounded and rooted by the entire history of the Haitian zombie.

[21] The trope itself functions within a gendered framework that applies almost exclusively to Black male characters. Black female characters tend to occupy far fewer roles in horror cinema, but when they do, they have their own set of anti-Black stereotypes that they fall into, such as the "Mammy" or the "Jezebel" stereotypes (see Bogle). A look at Black female characters in the zombie subgenre is important and possibly a topic for the future but is beyond the scope of this project.

seventeenth century when they were called "humours"—caricatures who possess one quality or have one goal that drives their actions throughout the narrative (102-3). In the examples noted above, for instance, Halloran is the "magical Negro" who must save Danny;[22] Mr. Arnold is the faithful servant who must get Jurassic Park back online;[23] and, Bubba is the "Sambo" who only cares about shrimp.[24] The flatness of Black characters suggests they are not merely simple-minded or "animalistic" but also content in their secondary roles (Coleman 24); as such, flat Black characters are used to justify slavery (Green) as well as neo-slavery.

While "the Black guy" is not exclusive to the zombie subgenre, or even horror more broadly, when he does appear in these sub/genres, he rarely survives, regardless of whether he has accomplished his single goal. He is often written by white writers and cast by white directors. As a result, he tends to fall flat and embody at least one of the many anti-Black stereotypes that dominates the film industry, and which Donald Bogle details. I will not focus on each anti-Black stereotype, but each one is part of the transmutation process, so each time a Black body appears onscreen, it carries with it the potential to become reinscribed by, or resist, these stereotypes—and when they resist, it can be in minor ways, such as Ben in *Night*, or more significant ways, such as Chris in *Get Out*, and thus rework "the Black guy" trope.

The earliest films consisted of series photography, a set of still photographs that, when exposed at short intervals and then projected in order, result in the illusion of motion onscreen (Monahan and Barsam 344). Two technological innovations made this possible: 1) the *revolver photographique*, which was invented in 1874 by Janssen and allowed for short intervals between exposures to be taken on the same revolving plate (Monahan and Barsam 344); and 2) the zoopraxiscope, which was a projector invented in 1880 that allowed for the revolving plate to be projected (Monahan and Barsam 344-45). Eadweard Muybridge was the first to make use of these two technologies together to share a two-second clip of a Black man riding a horse (see fig. 7; Monahan and Barsam 344-45). As such, the first "actor" in the

[22] For more information on the "magical Negro" trope as well as Halloran's character in *The Shining,* see Coleman 206-7.

[23] For more information on the faithful servant trope, see, Bogle 35-6.

[24] For more information on the "Sambo" trope, see, Boskin 37-9.

very first moving picture was a Black man.[25] Despite the fact that the name of the jockey is lost to history,[26] Yoonji Han argues that Muybridge's moving picture is "a glimpse into Black success during the Jim Crow era." This is because during Jim Crow, horse racing was one of the few professions in which Black people could earn a modest living and, as Han calls it, achieve "major success." In spite of this "success," the earliest representation of the Black body onscreen is still rooted in the practices of slavery. For example, the rise of Black jockeys, such as the one that appears in Muybridge's moving picture, occurred during the antebellum period in the United States when enslaved Black people were responsible for tending the plantation's horse herds (Newsham).[27]

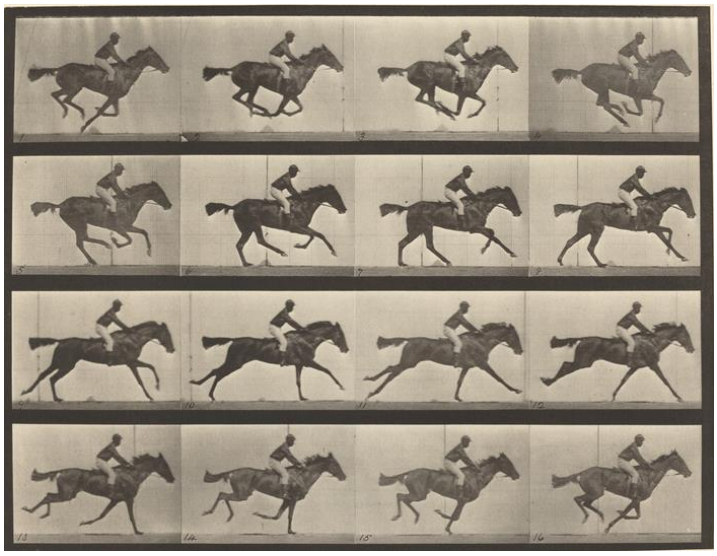

Figure 7: Study of a Horse in Motion by Eadweard Muybridge, 1878.

Moreover, Muybridge's moving picture may be an early example of the stereotype of the Black athlete, which is also a representation that functions within the symbolic and material matrix of slavery practices. Ricky Rasmussen, Anthony Esgate, and David Turner suggest that athletic prowess for Black people is stereotypically associated with biological constitution—"as innate and not earned" (Moskowitz and Carter 140)—whereas athletic prowess for white athletes is associated with hard work (429) and socioeconomic factors (432-33; Rada 7). What this suggests is that Black people are naturally endowed with athleticism and do not have to work for their athletic success, but this also becomes correlated with the idea that Black people are not "academically gifted" (Rasmussen et al.

[25] Muybridge's moving picture is part of a larger series that he created; it is ultimately impossible to prove which part of the series came first (Han).

[26] Jordan Peele responds to the anonymity of the Black jockey in his 2022 film *Nope*. The film follows the Hayward family, who are supposedly descended from the Black jockey.

[27] Because Black jockeys were successful, white jockeys began to use intimidation tactics, such as whipping Black jockeys with their riding crops during races and ramming their horses into the rails, resulting in the age of Black jockeys coming to an end early in the twentieth century (Newsham).

434). Gordon B. Moskowitz and Devon Carter, citing Jamie Barden et al., call this "a positive quality [athleticism] nested among a set of mostly negative traits comprising the global stereotype" (140). The Black athlete stereotype thus becomes a kind of flat character because "there is no difference in how the black man versus the black athlete is seen" (Moskowitz and Carter 140). Because Muybridge's moving picture is the first Black representation in film, the anti-Black stereotype of the Black athlete is born alongside it; although the Black jockey in Muybridge's moving picture is not technically "the Black guy," the Black athlete stereotype becomes an enduring part of "the Black guy" trope in horror, including zombie narratives. Luther West, for example, was a former pro basketball player prior to the zombie outbreak in *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010) and *Resident Evil: Retribution* (2012), Theodore Douglas, a.k.a. T-Dog, played college football prior to the outbreak in *The Walking Dead* television series, and Peter in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) explains that he has two brothers, one of which is a pro ball player. Interestingly, Peter's other brother is in jail. When "the Black guy" in zombie films is not literally an athlete, he is often represented as well-built, such as Kenneth in *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) and Vanderhohe in *Army of the Dead* (2021).

Muybridge's moving picture may be considered an early example of a Black stereotype, but that stereotype is greatly expanded on through the history of minstrelsy and early narrative film, including the first "blockbuster" film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).[28] Minstrel shows were a popular form of entertainment in nineteenth-century America (Waterhouse 1). Beginning in the 1820s, minstrel shows emerged, featuring white stage performers in blackface who repeat and popularize grotesque anti-Black stereotypes (Waterhouse 1). Richard Waterhouse argues that these shows not only encapsulated "a nostalgic longing for the lost plantation," but they presented a place for white urbanites to receive "reassurance about the superiority of their own mores" (7). Because minstrel shows represented "the Black guy" as "Too childish and doltish to present a challenge, he provided re-assurance that the fertile soil of the West would remain the white man's property" (Waterhouse 8). In addition to contributing many of the anti-Black stereotypes that are still present today, there are two reasons why the minstrel shows are crucial in the rise of "the

[28] The film was originally titled *The Clansman* after Thomas Dixon Jr.'s novel, *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the KKK* (1905) from which it drew inspiration (Coleman 22).

Black guy" trope: Minstrel shows, like Muybridge's moving picture, lay claim to firstness. In 1843, the first full-length minstrel show was performed, and its success inspired imitators across the nation (Waterhouse 102); thus, the minstrel shows popularized certain stereotypical forms of anti-Black representation (Waterhouse 9). And so, many of the anti-Black stereotypes that are still prolific in film today infected the American imaginary long before the invention of film.

It was not until 1915 with the release of *The Birth of a Nation*, however, that "the Black guy" trope officially appeared in film, partly because the film is considered to be "the first true feature-length film made in America" (Guerrero 17; Coleman 23), but also because it depicts for the first time onscreen many of the anti-Black stereotypes that dominate contemporary film today. D.W. Griffith's silent film takes place in the South during the American Civil War and the Reconstruction period, chronicling the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln as well as the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Although there are many Black characters in the film, the majority are played by white actors in blackface (Coleman 23),[29] repeating the stereotypes established by the early minstrel shows, and most of these characters are portrayed negatively. For example, Gus "the renegade," played by a white actor in blackface, is depicted stalking Flora Cameron, one of the daughters of the Southern Cameron family. During the scene, the camera switches between close-up shots of Gus (see fig. 8) and full body shots of Flora. Gus' face is filmed mostly in shadow, which leaves him partially concealed and draws attention to his eyes staring offscreen, presumably at Flora, whereas the full depiction of Flora's body suggests she is the object of Gus'—and

Figure 8: A screengrab of Gus from *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915.

[29] Griffith claimed there were few Black actors on the West coast, so he had to use white actors in Blackface; however, critics, such as Erin Blakemore, note how the few Black actors that Griffith did cast played minor roles and were never depicted in the same scenes as white women.

the audience's—male gaze. Gus then jumps out from behind a tree to claim he now has a right to marry her and begins to chase her through the forest. The scene ends with Flora falling off the precipice of a large rock to her death, suggesting that death is more appealing than contact with the Black man (Coleman 25). This scene represents "eye rape" where "a Black male sexual predator advance[es] on white girlhood" (Coleman 25), a threat that is solidified in the final scene of the film where the KKK ride victorious through the street, and the male KKK members are depicted framing the white women as if to protect them.

The film also introduces the first "Mammy" and "Uncle Tom" stereotypes in film—both played by white actors in blackface—who, even after Emancipation, decide to continue to work as servants for the Cameron family (Coleman 23). The other Black characters are represented as "corrupt politicians, robbers, would-be rapists, arsonists, cheats, and (attempted) murderers" (Coleman 23). According to Robin R. Means Coleman, who discusses the film in relation to horror, the impact of *The Birth of a Nation* "remains a wicked bell that cannot be unrung" because within its racist depictions, "Blackness was effectively transmogrified, with Blacks becoming one of the most loathsome and feared of all creatures" (25). Despite the fact that *The Birth of a Nation* is not horror, Coleman includes it in her comprehensive analysis of Black representation in horror because it contributes "to our understanding of Blackness-as-monstrosity" (8). According to Coleman, the film "soundly casts Blacks as dangerous, horrific figures—monstrous, savage boogeyman" that become "inscribed into our cultural imagination" (8). As such, the film plays a larger role in cementing anti-Black stereotypes in the American imaginary both in and beyond horror.

Monahan and Barsam argue that *The Birth of a Nation* is "known as one of the most important and controversial movies ever made," noting how "its racist content is repugnant," but then they immediately provide a comprehensive list of elements that, they argue, prove it to be "technically brilliant" (35). While the film undoubtedly contributed much in terms of cinematic developments, such as multiple camera setups, cutting between shots, panning, and flashbacks (Monahan and Barsam 350), the fact that Monahan and Barsam seem to justify the film's racism because it also contributed significant technological innovations demonstrates the importance of addressing this film as part of the rhizombie. Monahan and Barsam's point seemingly sets racism and technological innovations in contrast, but I argue that these two things are initially interconnected in *The Birth of a Nation*—not unlike the

zombie and Blackness—and as such, technological innovations come at the expense of Black representation in a form of neo-slavery, suggesting that "progress" requires the subjugation of Black peoples. The Black body becomes trapped within the stereotypes put forth in *The Birth of a Nation* because critics cannot move beyond the film's technological contributions. For example, Monahan and Barsam go on to explain that Griffith, "tells his story by distorting history and reaffirming the racist stereotypes of his time," and while they do not seem to excuse Griffith's antebellum Southern ideology, they immediately follow this point by stating, "Yet this profoundly American epic, a work of vicious propaganda, is also a cinematic masterpiece" (351). As such, Monahan and Barsam cannot discuss the film as strictly racist or strictly a masterpiece, and their aporia signifies how anti-Black stereotypes have infected the American imaginary in rhizomatic ways.

Muybridge's moving picture, the minstrel shows, and *The Birth of a Nation* may be missing zombies, but they nonetheless feed into my argument about the rhizombie because they demonstrate the entanglement between the Black body, the proliferation of anti-Black mentality infecting America, and slavery. "The Black guy" trope is an amalgamation of the many representations—anti-Black or not—of Black people. While "the Black guy" is a cultural construction rooted in racist white representations of Blackness, it is not static and therefore is always open to the possibility of transformation. I therefore argue that it is the possibility of a better "Black guy" trope that Peele believes Romero started.

"I Voted for Obama": *Trans*plantations and the Carceral Continuum

Get Out is a zombie film that reshapes "the Black guy" trope in the post-Obama age. The film follows Chris Washington, a young Black man, meeting the rich family of his white girlfriend, Rose Armitage, for the first time only to find out the real reason he's been brought to the Armitage house is to be auctioned off, following which, the highest bidder—a white male art dealer—will be "transmuted" into his body.[30] The premise of the film is that the aging, rich, white population wishes to be faster and stronger and young again, so they bid on the bodies of the unwitting Black people that Rose lures back to the Armitage family home,

[30] All quotations from the films are my own transcriptions unless otherwise noted.

or what Susan Scott Parrish more precisely calls the "transplantation house" (111). Rose's parents—a neuroscientist and a hypnotist—then perform the transmutation. At the climax of the film, Chris finds himself strapped to a table prepped for the final stage of the transmutation, but he manages to free himself and murder his captors. As Chris tries to escape, Rose intercedes, and the two find themselves fighting in the middle of the road in front of the Armitage house.

Peele wrote several endings for *Get Out* that, taken together, demonstrate the shifting understandings of Black subjecthood in a post-Obama America. The ending for the theatrical release will be discussed in the conclusion to this chapter; for now, I would like to focus on one of the alternate endings. It depicts Chris strangling Rose and then being arrested by two white police officers. The next scene reveals Rod, a Black Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agent and close friend of Chris, visiting him in prison and enquiring about the details from his experience at the Armitage house. Unfortunately, Chris cannot seem to recall anything from that night, but he states, "I'm good; I stopped it" before walking away down the prison's long white hallway (*Get Out*).

There are many key scenes in the film that use blackness to hide whiteness, in a manner similar to that of blackface: the shutters on the Armitage transplantation house, for example, are black and are often depicted closed, shielding the white bodies inside from the viewer (and at times, from Chris); similarly, the Black bodies who have already undergone transmutation are hiding the white consciousnesses who infiltrated them. The prison scene, however, uses blackness to draw attention to the Black bodies imprisoned within its walls. This scene is composed using three key camera angles: Chris' point of view (POV) from behind the glass, Rod's POV from the other side, and a *mise-en-abyme* shot, which is a compositional shot whereby the viewer sees multiple representations of a subject or object

Figure 9: A screengrab of Chris from the alternate ending of *Get Out*, 2017.

(Auger 131).[31] In this case, it is a *mise-en-abyme* of various Black bodies framed by a black window that seem to recede infinitely into the background (see fig. 9). The black window frame extends the blackness of the frame itself and thus the prison structure into the very Blackness of Chris and the other prisoners as their skin colour becomes almost indistinguishable from the architecture, suggesting they can easily become amalgamated within the prison structure. This is unsurprising, since the Black population has always been overrepresented in the American prison system. For example, the 2023 statistics from the American Federal Bureau of Prisons reveals that the Black population accounts for 38.5% of inmates in the United States while the census shows that Black Americans only account for approximately 13.6% of the country's total population (United States Census Bureau).

Moreover, the framing in *Get Out* positions Chris and other Black bodies within a kind of media space, similar to a television screen, which is a potent symbol throughout Peele's film to draw attention to media's under- and misrepresentation of Black culture. In this manner, the prison scene is indicative of Michel Foucault's panopticon, a form of asymmetrical surveillance whereby Black bodies are on display and policed—guarded by the edges of the window frame, the edges of the *mise-en-scéne*, as well as the prison guards—but cannot themselves fully participate in the active gaze of surveillance. The POV shots, for instance, suggest that Black bodies can only look at one another and not out at the viewer or the white prison guard. When discussing the significance of media imagery throughout *Get Out*—specifically in relation to an early scene depicting Chris staring at the television, afraid to call someone when his mother fails to return home (it is later revealed that she was in a hit and run and left bleeding in the street)—Peele admits, "We watch movies, screaming, 'Get Out!' in dark rooms at this screen that we cannot affect. It's a symbol for that, which stops us from action" (qtd. in Zinoman). The television—and the various signifiers that reference it—is asymmetrical surveillance, and as such, it becomes implicated in the carceral continuum and represents—and often ideologically supports—neo-slavery. Parrish, working through the neo-slavery qualities of Peele's film, argues that this early scene showing Chris's inability to

[31] One of the most prominent *mise-en-abyme* scenes comes from *Citizen Kane* (1941), which Peele is likely drawing on and critiquing. The final shot of Kane in Orson Welles' film depicts him in profile and walking in front of a mirror. As he does so, his body is reflected infinitely into the distance, and despite the ubiquity of his appearance, this moment contributes to the mystery of Kane's character. Borrowing this signification suggests that perhaps Chris' identity remains a mystery in the alternate ending.

act is a representation of "a failure to represent—to perceive, to witness, to stand for—the catastrophes of one's ancestors" (120). Parrish goes on to connect this scene to the longer history of plantation slavery and how "the (white) television is coterminous with (Black) nonrepresentation" because "White TV cannot mediate Black social memory" (120). An example of this inability can be found in Tom Savini's 1990 remake of *Night of the Living Dead* when Harry sneaks upstairs in the farmhouse and tries to steal the television—the only remaining source of information during the zombie outbreak. Harry seeks to horde access to media for himself, denying Ben, a Black man, any share in it. Parrish suggests that the television, generally (and the prison, I might add),[32] reproduces the slavery system in new ways as it also replicates the oppressive structures that continue to misrepresent, commit violence against, and disappear Black bodies.

While Parrish focuses on several scenes in *Get Out*, she does not spend time with the alternate ending. *Get Out*'s alternate ending, though, is the one that some viewers may initially expect due to the media's hand in constructing an ideological set of expectations regarding Black bodies discarded in the streets and overrepresented in the prison system. In an article on the film, Poll argues that "White people are incapable of recognizing that horror can be enfolded into their everyday lives," but "African Americans, in contrast, are keenly aware that the world is pervaded with horror and are constantly vigilant for signifiers of such" (69). Black people are hyperaware that, "given America's track record on race, Black history is, to quote Tananarive Due, Black horror" (*Horror Noire*), and thus the Black subject is marked by Wacquant's "carceral continuum." According to Wacquant, the "carceral continuum" "ensnares a supernumerary population of young black men, who either reject or are rejected by the deregulated low-wage labor market, in a never-ending circulus between the two institutions"—that is, the prison and the labour market (97) where the latter becomes subsumed into the former. The prison system is a modern-day slavery system that seeks to leverage free labour while maintaining Black subjugation (*Slavery by Another Name*). Prior to Emancipation, the American South relied upon slave labour to function, and after centuries of free labour leveraged through the slavery system, it did not entirely seem willing to pay for it after slavery was abolished in 1865 (*Slavery by Another Name*). After all, the sales of enslaved people in America were more profitable than lands, banks, railroads, factories, and

[32] For more studies on the relationship between prisons and slavery, see, A. Davis; Gilmore; Price.

gold products accumulated together (*Exterminate All the Brutes Part 4: The Bright Colors of Fascism*). Dennis Childs argues that "U.S. jurisprudence, where one is considered innocent until proven guilty, has been nullified for the progeny of slaves," and that a "particular encoding of criminality" manifested postbellum in the prison system (205). One such example comes from Alabama in 1874 when convict leasing resulted in earnings of $14,000 in its first year for the state, an amount previously unseen (*Slavery by Another Name*). Because of these continuing social structures, Black bodies are never able to escape the system entirely; even if they exist far outside the walls of the prison, they still exist within the carceral continuum: "*being* in Black skin is enough to be at risk of capture" (Koné 152). Franz Fanon expresses a similar feeling when he claims that the Black man "cannot escape his body" (65), and Poll asserts that "To be Black […] is to be fundamentally, ontologically, marked as a slave" (71). Part of the carceral continuum arises within the new economics of neo-slavery, but part also becomes the transformation of the prison system within a discourse of what Childs calls the "blackfacing" of crime: "From the convict lease system through the prison industrial complex, a seemingly irrevocable badge of guilt has been grafted onto blackness" (205). As such, Black bodies are implicated in the prison system—they are "stenciled as perpetual convicts" (Childs 205) due to the "ideological blackfacing" of the prison system (Childs 201)—and therefore always at risk of imprisonment a.k.a. re-enslavement, which is exactly what occurs in the alternate ending for *Get Out*.

In his commentary to his film, Peele calls the prison "a system that values rich white people," and which thus functions not merely to control and exploit Black bodies but to do so in the name of maintaining the value of white bodies ("Get Out | Director Commentary"), and, I might add, the legal system. When discussing the scene leading up to the alternate ending, when the police car rolls up on Chris kneeling threateningly over Rose, Poll argues, punning on the relations between film and material history, that "reel history has aesthetically trained us how to read this scene" as "the pervasive threat of the Black rapist" and citing how it initially resembles a scene from *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)—as discussed above—"in which the monstrosity of Blackness is symbolized by the Black rapist" (92). This scene also alludes to *Night of the Living Dead* in which a white girl, Barbra, is trapped inside the farmhouse with the Black man, Ben, who has no qualms about smacking her around when she becomes hysterical. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Peele states, in *Night of*

the Living Dead "a black man is caged up in a house with a white woman who is terrified. But you're not sure how much she's terrified at the monsters on the outside or this man on the inside" (Zinoman). The inability to distinguish the root cause of fear represents "the form of racism that Peele is interested in displaying (namely, white liberal racism), in that both" zombification in *Get Out* as well as white liberal racism "are difficult to discern, discuss, and explain to those who are not exposed to its dangers," and therefore are similarly deadly for Black men like Ben. In the same interview, Peele admits that *Get Out* "is about how we deal with race. As a black man, sometimes you can't tell if what you're seeing has underlying bigotry, or it's a normal conversation and you're being paranoid. That dynamic itself is unsettling" (Zinoman). The image of Chris standing over the body of his white girlfriend followed by the appearance of blue and red flashing lights foreshadows Chris either being shot by the policemen or arrested because his actions have threatened the white female body onscreen. Poll refers to the alternate ending as "the true ending" because it adheres to the history of Black lives in America (93). There is no potential for Chris—or Ben—to receive justice because Black bodies are framed by the carceral continuum. In the context of the "I voted for Obama era" in America (which posits that the election of a Black president signifies a "post-racial" or even "post-racist" age),[33] an outcome where Chris is either shot and/or arrested is likely, especially given the hit-and-run incident involving Chris' mother. I argue that this ending is a kind of virality or contagion because "The circulation and consumption of the images of suffering and lifeless black bodies are longstanding features of US visual culture" (Dubuisson 255), which the theatrical ending challenges. Similar to the proliferation of images of suffering and lifeless Black Americans, *Get Out*'s alternate ending functions within the carceral continuum whereby Black bodies are improperly policed and discarded in the street.[34]

In the final scene of the alternate ending, when Chris is arrested, he fully enters the carceral continuum, a space born from the "the hold of the slave ship" as "the prison repeats the logics, architectural and otherwise, of the slave ship" (Sharpe, qtd. in Poll 93). The image

[33] As Mr. Armitage demonstrates in *Get Out*, "I voted for Obama" is a statement employed by white liberals as a method for covering up their racism (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 200). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and David Dietrich calls this an example of the "color-blind racism" that characterizes "Obamerica" (198).

[34] In the case of George Floyd, there is an over policing of his body, whereas Chris' mother is arguably "under-policed" in so far as her case would not be deemed worthy enough to warrant much attention.

of Chris—and all other Black people, as signified by the *mise-en-abyme*—framed by the black window in the prison scene could thus be said to reflect enslaved people in the holds of the ships framed by a kind of black, square porthole.[35] Thus, the alternate ending makes it clear that *Get Out* demonstrates, in order to critique, how Black bodies are positioned as commodities—both as products of and workers within the system. Despite Chris' claim, because he enters the carceral continuum in the alternate ending, he really did not "stop it" at all.

However, Peele decided to avoid this narrative entirely because he thought that it "felt too easy" and therefore set his film in New York rather than a Southern red state (qtd. in Butler).[36] Instead, because the film portrays liberal white racism, it becomes a twisted homage of what Abdul Moiz calls "negrophilia": the rich white folks have chosen their Black victims not merely to exploit their prowess as part of the labor market but to praise it and embody it.[37] For example, Rose's grandfather has been transmuted into the body of Walter, who is a fast runner, and throughout the film, Chris witnesses Walter sprinting around the outside of the house at night. Rose's grandfather was a former track and field athlete, who cannot seem to get past his anger at having lost to Black athlete Jesse Owens. White athletes dominated sprinting in the 1930s when Jesse Owens won his four Olympic medals (Rasmussen et al. 427), so Walter's expectation is not necessarily to win, but not to lose to a Black athlete. However, by the time that *Get Out* was released, Black athletes dominated the sport (Rasmussen et al. 427-28).[38] Similar to Muybridge's Black jockey and the larger history of Black stereotypes in film, Black bodies in *Get Out* are reduced to a single quality that serves white "audiences" and are usually associated with physical prowess—which, in turn, signifies a lack of education within the larger white supremacist culture that disassociates physical from mental prowess. However, the specific reference to Jesse Owens

[35] When slave ships were designed, extra portholes were added in an attempt to increase ventilation as there was nowhere in the holds for enslaved people to relieve themselves (Wolfe).

[36] Despite not wanting to set the film in a Southern red state, it was still filmed there. The house that is used as the Armitage house is located in Mobile, Alabama (Kazek).

[37] Chapter 3 addresses a version of "negrophilia" as it relates to Indigenous peoples.

[38] By the early twentieth century, Black athletes held 95% of the top sprinting times in the world (Rasmussen et al. 427). Additionally, Black athletes have broken the ten second barrier over 200 times whereas not a single white athlete has achieved this (Rasmussen et al. 428).

alludes to the history of not just the commodification but also the politicization of the Black body. Owens won at the 1936 Olympics when Adolf Hitler was gaining power, and Jelani Cobb argues that Owen's platform is constructed as a "symbolic victory over the rising tide of fascism in Germany" (qtd. in "What Jesse Owen's Story"). After the Olympics, a series of anti-Nazi "political myths" surrounded Owens, so Owens, as Harry Edwards states, is represented as "the defeat of Aryan ideology" (qtd. in "What Jesse Owen's Story"). Edwards also notes that "Black athletes became useful in 1936 [but only] as long as they didn't bring it home" to America, referring to "extend[ing] that political action and activity into the American context" (qtd. in "What Jesse Owen's Story"). Therefore, Walter's transmutation is motivated by a racist desire to be faster than a Black man who symbolises the downfall of white superiority, even as he assumes, in a layered form of racism, that he can only do so in a Black body; but Rose's grandfather wants to add to the humiliation of Black people a form of exploitation of labour via the imprisonment of Walter. This point is made all the more potent by the fact that he also works as the gardener. He and the other transmuted Black body (Georgina a.k.a. Grandmother Armitage) are "the help."

In this manner, *Get Out* suggests that not only are Black bodies represented as physically superior, but so too are their perspectives. Chris, for instance, is both a physical commodity and a cultural artefact. In the film, Rose's brother Jeremy tells Chris that "with your frame, your genetic make-up […] you'd be a beast," eyeing him as a potential option for his own future transmutation. Koné argues that, in this scene, "beast" functions as part of the film's neo-slavery narrative, alluding to "scientific racism and the animalization of black bodies to justify slavery" (160). Ultimately, Chris is purchased by Jim Hudson, an art dealer who went blind due to a genetic disease, because he wants Chris's artistic photographic perspective, and the alternate ending, for example, makes Chris a "martyr" for sacrificing himself to destroy the transplantation system ("Jordan Peele's Commentary"). What Hudson overlooks and what makes Chris a special commodity is the fact that his "eye," as Hudson calls it, is not a natural, biological endowment in the manner that Walter's sprinting and Black athleticism more broadly are depicted. Chris' photographic perspective comes from the cultural experience of being Black in America. In this manner, Peele points to the reduction of Black bodies as well as the white misunderstanding of Black lived experience. We can extend Rasmussen et al.'s "illusory correlation" where "a heuristic leads to the biased view

that two things, such as color and athleticism, go together in a far more straightforward way" (427) beyond the body to reveal how "stereotypes based on racial characteristics offer a cognitively simple means for classifying others while simultaneously failing to consider the wide variety of physical, mental, psychological, emotional, and cultural difference" (427).

Negrophilia in the film thus reveals how "post racial liberalism," as Moiz calls it, or the "post racial lie," as Peele calls it (Zinoman), is not the antithesis of or move away from the carceral continuum. In the commentary for the alternate ending, Peele admits, "I wrote this movie in the Obama era, and we were in this post-racial lie. This movie was meant to call out the fact that racism is still simmering underneath the surface, and so this [alternate] ending to the movie felt like it was the gut punch that the world needed because something about it rings very true." For instance, Rose's family insists that Obama was "the best president ever" and that they would have voted for him a third time, indicating that Obama is the beginning of a myth of "post-racialism" as well as the benchmark for Black success in America. Invoking the name of the first and only Black president becomes a necessary part of the performance of negrophilia. Negrophilia functions within the carceral continuum because it implicates all Black people within the "post-racial lie" merely by sharing similar shades of skin colour—they become trapped within a political system of Black cultural exchange as they always have. But, also, because America's election of a Black president suggests that "post-racialism" has been achieved, there is no more work to be done. Moiz argues that the film "portrays the romanticization of blackness by white people as an object to be accumulated instead of a cultural identity to be understood," let alone as beings with autonomy, and Robin R. Means Coleman and Mark H. Harris argue that "*Get Out* thus functions as a critique of white neoliberalism while simultaneously serving as a neoliberal text about race in America" (97). In this manner, the film suggests that Black people are trapped within the post-Obama, neoliberal agenda in a never-ending cycle, but the film also works to expose just how performative and incarcerating the post-racial lie is. Thus, negrophilia is woven into the black shutters on the Armitage house hiding the white liberal racism within its walls.

Robert Alpert argues that Obama's promise of "hope" "nostalgically evoked the early 60s Kennedy mythology" (17), and as such, becomes reminiscent of the politics informing *Night of the Living Dead*. And, indeed, the white liberal racism is precisely what makes *Get*

Out a kind of zombie film. Both Duffy and Mzilikazi Koné argue that *Get Out* deals with the kind of enslavement that is common in early Haitian zombie narratives, which are the antecedents of Romero's modern zombies. In *Get Out,* the Black victims find themselves trapped within their own bodies as Mrs. Armitage uses hypnotism to banish them to the "Sunken Place." While in the "Sunken Place," Chris can only gaze out from the dark depths of his unconscious through a rectangular hole that, similar to the prison window in the alternate ending, can be read as a multiple representation of prison, slave ships, and the television (see fig. 10). The viewer is not positioned in the warm sitting room of the Armitage house alongside Mrs. Armitage, but is placed behind Chris, looking upwards and out. Consequently, the audience is meant to identify with Chris; however, because Chris, like the film's audience, can only watch, he cannot speak back to his captors. Peele admits that "By the middle – or even earlier in the film – everyone is Chris" (qtd. in Ramos). Moreover, the Armitage family—the embodiment of post-racial white neoliberalism—is just a different kind of slave master. This scene bridges the seeming divide between the slave ships and the media: the captors look down from a sunny deck through the square hatch while, sitting in the dark ships' holds, the enslaved people could only gaze up out of the darkness. The enslaved people are positioned at or just below the water line during a ship's passage across the Atlantic; they are literally "sunken" in place. Kevin Wynter makes a similar argument about the "Sunken Place" and Black positionality within society, but he does not draw on the literal imagery of the slave ships: "The metaphorical radius of the sunken place is delimited by transatlantic slavery" (117). He goes on to argue that "it [the Sunken Place] is a psychic extension of the prison industrial complex and other carceral continuums where Black life is immobilized and held captive in perpetuity" (Wynter 117).

Figure 10: A screengrab of Chris in the "Sunken Place" from *Get Out*, 2017.

According to Koné, the "Sunken Place" is a form of "body colonization" that functions as "a re-interpretation of the enslaved zombie" whereby the victim can no longer

control their own body and becomes trapped within it (151). Haitian zombies (sometimes called zombis/zonbis), are not the flesh-eating monsters that dominate contemporary narratives, but are "a product of sorcery in which a witch doctor enslaves a victim whom he has raised from the dead to do his bidding or work for him for free" (Lauro, "Introduction" ix).[39] Like the transmuted consciousnesses of the Black victims in *Get Out*, the Haitian zombie is "perpetually in a semiconscious state in between living and dead," allowing the Bokor, or Vodou "witch doctor," to control the zombie using narcotics or some other liquid concoction (Lauro, "Introduction" ix-x). Therefore, the Black victims in *Get Out* have much in common with the early Haitian zombies. Elizabeth McAlister asserts that the "zombie was born (so to speak) in what Michael Taussig (1987) terms the colonial 'space of death' and is inextricable from the 'culture of terror' of the plantation" (461). As such, it always already embodies this history. In a similar vein, Sarah Juliet Lauro asserts that "the zombie is an 'American' monster only in the sense that it comes directly out of a history of colonialism, enslavement, exploitation, and appropriation" ("Introduction" ix). However, Lauro goes on to note that "The zombie's lineage can be traced to African soul capture myths that were carried to the New World aboard slave ships bound for the colonial Caribbean" ("Introduction" ix). It is within this paradox—being authentically American because it is not from America—that both the zombie and Blackness reside.[40] Both are born somewhere during the transatlantic passage; both are a blending of African and Western culture; both are rooted in coloniality; both exist within the carceral continuum; and due to all these entanglements, both are part of the rhizombie.

Reading *Get Out* as a Haitian zombie film reveals not merely how the zombie continues to shift, but also how Romero's modern zombie is not "new" in the sense that it rejects its Haitian antecedents, as many critics argue[41]—it also demonstrates how the Haitian zombie and what it signifies, like Peele's claim about racism in America, never truly dies. Duffy goes on to note that "In viewing *Get Out* for what it is – a zombie film – its depiction of the return of the repressed becomes more visible: slavery, colonialism, and racism are

[39] The term "witch doctor" to refer to the zombie master, also known as a "Bokor," has been criticized as a racist misrepresentation of the Vodou religion (Koné 154).

[40] I am speaking of "Blackness" as that which is part of but also a move away from African roots.

[41] See Bishop *How Zombies*, 9; Burger 17; Faragher 89.

exposed as America's living dead, still walking amongst us," and "By reading *Get Out* as part of the great American zombie tradition, Peele's film is suddenly revealed to be even more subversive than initially meets the eye." Koné suggests that the reason why the film is overlooked in the zombie subgenre is because the modern zombie has replaced the Haitian zombie in the American imaginary: from "enslavement" to "inscrutable monstrosity" (151). The way in which the "Black people [are] trapped through mind control and body colonization, enslaved in their own bodies" (Koné 151) in *Get Out* is indicative of the kind of subjugation prominent in such early Haitian zombie narratives as Seabrook's 1929 novel *The Magic Island* and the 1932 film *White Zombie*, as well as later Haitian-authored works, such as *Dézafi*. The turn back to the Haitian zombie demonstrates how race and its connections with slavery continue to significantly impact cultural expression because, as Crump argues, "racism festers" in America. Peele therefore looked to Romero because *Night of the Living Dead* and its "sequels" were some of "the few American horror films to tackle the thorny subject of race" (Crump). When discussing how *Get Out* "tackles" race, Zinoman, like many critics caught between the two films, immediately turns to *Night of the Living Dead,* asserting how it "resonated with audiences" in 1968 because the film was released shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.. As such, turning now to the rhizombific entanglements of *Get Out* and *Night of the Living Dead* allows me to address the ultimate question put forth by Darlène Dubuisson: "What do irreverent representations of dead and suffering black bodies reveal about antiblack racialization in the US?" (256).

"We Speak": Haitian Zombies and Zonbis

The first mention of the term "zombie" in English is from white American explorer Seabrook, in his 1929 travelogue, *The Magic Island*. *The Magic Island* is a first-person account of Seabrook's travels in Haiti and deals extensively with what he calls Haitian Vodou.[42] Zombies are only mentioned in a brief section called, "…dead men working in the cane field" (Seabrook 92). Seabrook describes the Haitian zombies as "ragged creatures," "staring dumbly" (95); a zombie is "a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the

[42] See: Bishop *How Zombies*; Coleman; Comentale; McIntosh; McNally.

grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life—it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive" (93). In this manner, Romero's modern zombie does not seem like much of a turn away from the Haitian zombie as Seabrook describes them. Romero's zombies have risen from the grave, they move slowly, and they also "stare dumbly." Because Seabrook claims the Haitian zombie "must never be permitted to taste salt or meat" (96), there is still a hunger for meat prevalent in them, but they are not hungry for human flesh *per se* in the manner that Romero's zombies are. In contrast to Romero's zombies, the Haitian zombie is meant to inspire "pity" (Seabrook 100) as opposed to fear. At one point in the novel, Seabrook's informant, Polynice, points to a group of "four laborers, three men and a woman, [who] were chopping the earth with machetes, among straggling cotton stalks" (Seabrook 100), and Seabrook claims that "these were not living men and women but poor unhappy zombies whom Joseph and his wife Croyance had dragged from their peaceful graves to slave for him in the sun" (96). The modern zombie does not "slave" *per se*, and in fact, the biggest distinction between the two is that the modern zombie no longer has a master in the manner that the Haitian zombie does (Wetmore 9). However, the modern zombie is still ensnared by the carceral continuum and, as such cannot slough off the yoke of neo-slavery.

Seabrook's descriptions of the Haitian zombie are rooted in a colonial perspective, made clear by the fact that he travelled there during the United States Occupation of Haiti (1915-34), and his writing primarily targets the American readership. So, as his travelogue proliferated across the United States, so too did the representations of Haiti as a place of "evil practices" (Seabrook 94) and the Haitians as "poor unhappy *zombies*" (Seabrook 96). When discussing Seabrook's novel, Coleman and Harris believe it "used both these repulsive sentiments and fictive stories to advance the notion of a monstrous Blackness that would serve as the foundation for depictions of voodoo in horror cinema for decades to come" (138). A few years after the publication of *The Magic Island*, films, such as *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), were released. *White Zombie*, for instance, depicts Black Haitian zombies working in a sugar cane mill, commanded by a white voodoo master, "Murder" Legendre. When plantation owner Charles Beaumont falls in love with white woman, Madeleine, he decides to visit Legendre in his mill to contract his services as a voodoo master. The mill scene is visceral in its portrayal of zombie slave labour. The first

part of the scene depicts Black zombies carrying baskets of grain on their heads and dumping them into a pit where the grinding mechanism lives. At one point, a zombie stumbles and falls into the pit, but the work continues as the Black zombie is ground up with the grain. The Black zombie is quite literally worked to the bone, and its body becomes amalgamated into the labour system—it will forever be a part of the carceral continuum. The next part of the scene portrays Black zombies "staring dumbly" and hunched over as they rotate the internal mechanisms of the mill wheel. Meanwhile, the grinding sound of the wood and grain (and Black zombie bodies) permeates the space and is eerily reminiscent of what it must sound like in the holds of the slave ships with their creaking wood planks. As such, the rise of the Haitian zombie is coterminous with the Black enslaved people in Haiti as well as some of the stereotypes that were written on the Black body more broadly, and all of these depictions were fed to the American public by Seabrook and others in the guise of exotic "travel" to "uncivilised lands."

While Haiti was constructed as uncivilised and a threat to white women in America, such as Madeleine in *White Zombie*, it is also the home of the first slave rebellion in colonial history that blossomed into a successful slave revolution (1791-1804). As a result of the Haitian Revolution, slavery was abolished, and Haiti secured its independence from French colonial rule. As Franklin W. Knight notes, one of the unprecedented elements of the Haitian Revolution is that it allowed newly free people to become its politicians (103). Knight argues that revolutions, such as that which occurred in Haiti, "alter the way individuals and groups saw themselves and their place in the world," resulting in an emergence of political confidence (104). However, this also means that Black people in positions of power in Haiti became a threat to the narratives that maintained white racial superiority in America. Similar to the manner in which the white Southern states in America could only maintain their superiority after Emancipation by finding new ways to incarcerate Black bodies, America responded in a related manner after the success of the Haitian slave revolt and revolution because its success "defied an Enlightenment humanism and modernity premised on black 'non-being'" (Dubuisson 256). Because Haitian independence challenged the ideological divide that maintained white superiority over other races, it threatened everything upon which modern American civilisation depended. Dubuission states that, as a result, the Haitian revolution "has been one of the most systemically punished events in contemporary history"

(256). One of the ways in which Haiti was "punished" was in American media's demonization of Vodou culture (Dubuisson 256), specifically through the figure of the zombie in such works as *The Magic Island* and *White Zombie*. Megan Lynn Faragher argues that "The exotic imperial imaginary, triggered by Seabrook's prose, emerged in these films as a means of working through, or even reinforcing, colonial power dynamics" (70).

However, this demonization did not always take the form of explicit racism; in some cases, it manifested in something similar to the post-racial lie. Susan Zieger argues that Seabrook's "openness" to trying such new experiences as cannibalism whilst visiting West Africa is a representation of his "desire to shed his whiteness by participating in black rituals" (739), not unlike the Armitage family and the other rich white folks in *Get Out*. For instance, during an early exchange in the travelogue between Seabrook and Louis when Seabrook expresses that he would "give anything" to see Voodoo rituals in person, Louis replies, "'if you were only black!'" (15). Becoming Black was a goal to which Seabrook seems to have dedicated much of his efforts and, in his other works, achieved to an extent. In *Jungle Ways* (1931), another novel by Seabrook, he claims that the Yafouba villagers named him "Mogo-Dieman, 'the-black-man-who-has-a-white-face'" (Seabrook 10). Seabrook's desire to embody Blackness is prophetic of the negrophilia that plagues the Armitage's and the other rich white folk in *Get Out*. However, whereas the "transmutation" in *Get Out* displaces Black consciousness but still traps it within the Black body to make room for white infiltration,[43] Seabrook remains white on the outside and performs, rather than physically embodies, Blackness. Zieger goes on to note how "Seabrook cultivat[es] black identity, but as an emissary from white modernity, he retains the privilege of Enlightenment rationality" (739) just like the rich white folks in *Get Out*. As such, Seabrook can never really be Black, and in fact, can be seen as an early embodiment of the post-racial lie and the emergence of white liberal racism as a response to Black liberation.

Much has been written about the connections between Haiti and the zombie; however, scholars have focused predominantly on zombie narratives about Haitians rather than zombie narratives by Haitians, which is why Frankétienne's 1975 Haitian "zonbi" novel *Dézafi* is a useful intervention into the representation of Blackness in zombie narratives and

[43] The fact that the Black consciousness remains trapped within the body but further subjugated and displaced by the white consciousness suggests an extension of slavery.

its relation to my dissertation's larger argument regarding (post)colonial reworkings of this figure (moreover, I would be reproducing systems of coloniality by leaving out such an important contribution to the Haitian zombie). *Dézafi* takes place in rural Haiti and is the first novel published in Haitian Creole. The novel is written in "spiralism," a "poetics of protest" practiced by René Philoctète, Jean-Claude Fignolé, and Frankétienne and common in Haitian literature (Stofle). In spiralism, various moments of repetition suggest that time exists in a spiral, and the events keep turning back on themselves. The form is designed for the indigenous inhabitants of Haiti: "the laboring classes only have limited time—if they have any at all—to read printed characters…And so, it's a question of stating things quickly" (Frankétienne; qtd. in Stofle). The novel uses this form to embody the conditions of labour, saying of one of the recurring characters, Jéròm, that "Every day it's the same old dull routine for Jéròm: get up early in the morning; climb up the ladder; spend the day curled up in the attic; climb down the ladder in the evening when Alibé comes home from the farm" (Frankétienne 35). Jéròm figures his entire life in terms of this repetition. However, Corine Stofle argues that "Spiralism [also] aims to cleanse the written word of its bourgeois nature by freeing it from the conventional sentence." *Dézafi*, for instance, is written for the masses of Haiti as a way to express their indigenous experience and inspire a sympathetic share in their suffering. By drawing on spiralism and using Haitian Creole, *Dézafi* uses form to simultaneously practice and resist the conditions of labour. For instance, as a kind of repetition, spiralism is reminiscent of Jéròm's "same old dull routine," yet, and Stofle notes, it is also a move away from the "bourgeois nature" of writing.

The novel contains several perspectives and various forms of poetry and prose, and it uses the zonbi to represent the Haitian collective, which is something the Haitian people desired to maintain. The Haitians have a kind of voice as a portion of the novel is written from their collective consciousnesses as zonbis: "*we lose our way at a crossroads. We mean to walk straight, but we take a crooked path. At times we turn in circles. We move crablike, ass backward. Where are we going? Where do we want to go? We mumble ceaselessly. We speak to ourselves. Our words come out upside down*" (Frankétienne 5). The zonbis in the novel always "speak" in italics using collective pronouns, such as "we" and "our." In a form of spiralism, the repetition of the pronoun "we" plus a verb—lose, mean, turn, move, and so on—is an assertion of identity taking action despite having little to no control over said

action; they are a multiplicity and speak as a multiplicity reminiscent of the rhizombie. After all, each of these statements is active in form, ensuring that the "we" is performing the action rather than having the action performed upon them. The zonbis express self-awareness and desire when they narrate their own actions but cannot seem to control their bodies as they "*turn in circles*" and their "*words come out upside down*." In this manner, they seem to undermine some of the qualities that dominate the Haitian zombies of the American imaginary. The novel does so as well when it ends with a successful uprising, as the zonbis emerge from their subdued state and, together, overthrow plantation owner Sintil, the novel's antagonist. The Haitian zonbis are like Chris emerging from the "Sunken Place." Frankétienne therefore demonstrates that the zonbis, or zombies, can be reinscribed within frameworks of Black resistance even if they cannot exactly eschew all the stereotypes that have been forced upon their bodies. For that, we can now turn to Romero's zombieverse, which demonstrates how the transformation of Black representation was not instantaneous but rather developed over time.

The Black Guy Dies Last: Colour Blindness and Riding Shotgun

Night of the Living Dead is the first of six films that comprise Romero's *Living Dead* franchise, and it is responsible for reshaping both the trope of "the Black guy" and giving us the modern zombie in horror. The other Romero films are *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), *Survival of the Dead* (2009), and the forthcoming *Twilight of the Dead*. Additionally, *The Living Dead: A Novel* (2020) was written by Romero in collaboration with Daniel Kraus but was released posthumously (how fitting for the father of the modern zombie). There are also three remakes of Romero's works. In 1990, Tom Savini directed a remake of *Night of the Living Dead*. In this latter version, Ben is played by Tony Todd, another prominent Black actor heralded for his contributions to the transformation of "the Black guy" trope in horror cinema.[44] In 2004,

[44] Todd is best known for his role in *Candyman* (1992). Similar to *Night of the Living Dead*, Coleman argues that *Candyman* "contributed significantly to discussions and debates regarding not only Black identities (gender, sexualities, class, ideologies, and the like) but also their proximity to interpretations of what is horrifying" (7). While *Candyman* gave us a "Black monster" (Coleman 260), he is a sympathetic figure because he is a victim of white racialized violence.

Zack Snyder directed a remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, while in 2008, Steve Miner directed a remake of *Day of the Dead*. Each remake includes Romero as writer. Collectively, the films in Romero's franchise (1968-2020) take place in the same universe but chronicle different aspects and experiences of the zombie epidemic, from the outbreak in *Night of the Living Dead* to the establishment of new social structures many years later in *Land of the Dead*. Steven Shaviro believes that the franchise "destabilizes structures of power and domination […] by pushing to an outrageous extreme the consequences of manipulation, victimization, and Nietzschean 'slave morality'" (18). To accomplish this destabilization, the first four films prominently challenge the dominant trope of "the Black guy" by representing Black characters as competent, both physically and intellectually, eschewing the kinds of stereotypes Black characters in horror typically embody pre-Romero. Romero's Black characters are generally morally superior (McAlister 478), they make friends with the white female protagonist (even Ben, who slaps Barbra), and they fight for a collective rather than their individual desires.

Night of the Living Dead—the film that "started it," as Peele says—takes place in a farmhouse in Pennsylvania during a zombie outbreak in 1960s America. The film follows Ben, played by Duane Jones, who is holed up in the farmhouse with a random group of other survivors: Barbra, who is the white damsel in distress; the Coopers—Harry, Helen, and Karen—a white nuclear family; and, a young white couple, Tom and Judy. Ben is a well-dressed, well-spoken Black man who seems to be the only character (except perhaps Tom) who is calm and capable. After the other characters are killed by the ghouls, Ben is left as the last man standing. Meanwhile, an all-white militia makes their way across the state, killing and burning the bodies of the infected. The militia is led by someone simply called "Chief," who is accompanied by several men in uniform. They are also followed by reporters with their cameras, implicating both law enforcement and the media in the militia's actions. When they happen upon the farmhouse, Ben is hiding in the basement. The film ends with him emerging from the basement only to be mistaken for one of the infected; he is shot, killed, and burned on a pyre with the bodies of the ghouls.

This final scene leaves the question remaining: if Ben cannot propel himself beyond the carceral continuum, how is it that his character has altered the landscape of Black representation in horror cinema? Nigerian critic Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns against

falling into "the danger of a single story," meaning to avoid the reduction of a group of peoples to a single representation that has been repeated in literature and other media (Adichie). Adichie speaks specifically about the many misrepresentations of Africa and its peoples in the Western imaginary, but her statement encapsulates the role to which Black and African peoples have been relegated in the film industry. This is because "Hollywood couldn't wrap its mind around Blacks playing anything in horror movies other than comic relief Spooks, anonymous servants, or savage tribesmen—all of which were, of course, increasingly frowned upon" (Coleman and Harris 21). As such, the appearance of the lone Black man in a house full of white people "add[s] a palpable layer of racial tension" (Duffy) that overhauls the ways in which audiences of horror movies were conditioned to read the Black body on screen by the 1960s. Ben is not comedic, he does not exhibit fear or flee the situation, he immediately introduces himself the moment he appears on screen, and he is the best dressed and most well-spoken character in the film. Ben, "the Black guy," defies all manner in which Black bodies have been figured, but he still dies. While Romero and Jones transform "the Black guy" trope in many ways, perhaps the world, as Jones asserts, was not ready for him to survive (Coleman and Harris 228-229).

Coleman and Harris argue that "the mere casting of Black performers often colors (no pun intended) the reading of a film" (98), and even Romero admitted, "When Ben is a Black man, even I am forced to see the racial overtones" (qtd. in Coleman and Harris 144). Despite this re-inscription, though, Ben's race is never mentioned in the film (Camille Moore). However, the casting of Jones affected not just how all other scenes in the film are viewed but also how the ending itself was shaped:

> Jones couldn't help but be more cognizant of the racial import of the role [of Ben] than George Romero, who hadn't aimed for any sort of statement on race. Jones realized that even in death, Ben's martyrdom could carry heroic weight, given the often tragic struggles for equality in the 1960s: "I convinced George that the Black community would rather see me dead than saved, after all that had gone on." His unjust death thus became a powerful reflection upon the racial violence and assassinations of the Civil Rights era. (Coleman and Harris 228-229)

Moreover, his death demonstrates what the Black community wanted, at least as Jones saw it. This reinscription of the ending may be motivated by intentions similar to Chris in the alternate ending for *Get Out*. In sacrificing himself, Jones as Ben bolsters the Civil Rights platform of the 1960s. While Ben's character was subject to colour-blind casting (Coleman and Harris 144), meaning his race was never officially written into the script and not considered a quality of who could read for the part, Coleman and Harris argue the casting of Jones in a racially fueled America "threatened to define the fate of Black roles in horror for generations to come" (24) and basically re-represents how all other scenes in the film are read. For example, Lisa Lampert-Weissig argues that several scenes in the film are eerily similar to newspaper images of slave patrols and lynch mobs (22).

During a scene where the group are trying to secure a means of escape, Ben, Tom, and Judy attempt to move the pickup truck from the front of the farmhouse to the back where there is a fuel pump. With Tom and Judy in the front, Ben is perched on the back of the pickup holding a torch (see fig. 11). While the Black protagonist and his allies are the ones driving the pickup, the imagery of the truck—especially with the grainy black and white filming—is inextricably linked to not just the history of racism in America but its ongoingness. For instance, in 2013, Joseph Paul Leonard, a white man from Sacramento, California, drove his green Chevy pickup truck over Toussaint Harrison, a Black man who was deliberately targeted by Leonard when Leonard witnessed Harrison speaking to a female friend, Samantha Silva (Higgins and Valandra 20). Making it clear that his racism lies behind this attack, Leonard blames Obama for the situation, claiming "just because we got Obama for a president, these people think they are real special" (qtd. in Cornish). Leonard's displaced

Figure 11: A screengrab of Tom, Judy, and Ben from *Night of the Living Dead*, 1968.

blame reveals the post-racial lie and, in fact, demonstrates how racism has been fueled by the mere presence of a Black person in power. While Leonard originally engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with Harrison (Cornish), the fact that he took the time to get in his truck to administer the death blow demonstrates how the pickup truck becomes the vehicle of said violence. This is, of course, not a singular situation but part of the collection of "images of suffering" that Dubuisson claims are contagious, infecting and constructing race and racism in the American imaginary. Brandon M. Higgins and Valandra, who conducted interviews with two anonymous Black participants in a study on the topic of trucks as a symbol of racial violence, cite several other examples: in 1998, James Byrd Jr. was dragged for miles behind a pickup truck in Jasper, Texas, and in 2011, James Craig Anderson was killed in Jackson, Mississippi by a pickup truck driven by a group of white teens (Higgins and Valandra 19). One of the participants they interviewed admits, "I have come to unconsciously associate white guys in trucks with racial violence and injustice. The cells of my body feel like they are seared with terrorizing images of Blacks being harassed, threatened, and otherwise killed by white guys in trucks" (Higgins and Valandra 20). As such, one participant says, the pickup truck has become a "powerful cultural symbol" of America "Much like the confederate flag, white hooded men and women, cross burnings, the hang noose, and bullwhip" (qtd. in Higgins and Valandra 20). As a result, this participant goes on to claim that "white guys in trucks symbolize weapons of brutality, hatred, and race-based incidents of violence meted out against Black people for centuries" (qtd. in Higgins and Valandra 20).


Figure 12: A screengrab of the militia in *Night of the Living Dead*, 1990.

While the distant black and white filming of Ben, Tom, and Judy in the pickup truck in *Night of the Living Dead* is reminiscent of the "white guys in trucks," the audience is aware that there is nothing to fear from those inside the vehicle. Consequently, the film

seems to invert this imagery, however inadvertently and temporarily, but in placing Ben on the back of the truck—*a la* Rosa Parks—it still maintains a narrative of Black racial inferiority. While the 1990 remake reproduces this same scene, it makes a more explicit statement in terms of how race is figured in relation to the truck. Unlike the original, Barbara[45] escapes in the remake in hopes of finding help when she stumbles upon the white militia. After resting, Barbara awakes to witness the group "having fun" where they crowd around a corral, drinking beer and taunting a zombie (*Night of the Living Dead*). Surrounding the group are motorcycles and a series of pickup trucks (see fig. 12). The scene shifts to reveal other members of the militia shooting the lynched bodies of what are presumably zombies. Barbara initially seems shocked and disgusted, then the realisation dawns on her that these actions are not new nor are the humans any different from the monsters when she states, "they're us" (*Night of the Living Dead*). These scenes, directly juxtaposed in the film, collapse the symbolism of the pickup trucks with that of lynching, an act that has come to be associated primarily with racism against Black people in the American South (R. L. Harris 131).

The pickup truck and lynching in the 1990 *Night of the Living Dead* remake both function as part of the carceral continuum because they are wielded by the white militia, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the films' endings. While not specifically using the term "carceral," Robert L. Harris argues that "lynching is a part of this continuum," referring to the "violat[ion] of the black body" that occurs "From enslavement to the present time" (131). This continuation becomes

Figure 13: A screengrab of Ben's lifeless body in *Night of the Living Dead*, 1968.

[45] The 1990 version adds an "a" in the middle. While the 1968 version spells it "Barbra," many critics have misspelled her name when writing about the original film, so it seems as if the remake takes up this misspelling on purpose.

apparent when Ben emerges from his imprisonment only to be shot by his "saviours" reminiscent of how Emancipation was met by convict leasing and other forms of neo-slavery.[46] As the Chief states, "that's another one for the fire," the film suddenly switches to a series of black and white still images that depict various angles of Ben's lifeless body (see fig. 13; *Night of the Living Dead*). In this manner, the film relegates the situation to a mediated perspective as these images look similar to those that would appear in a newspaper—they are grainy, black and white stills that abruptly interrupt the live action elements of the film.[47] The multiple perspectives of his body emphasize the racist, and by extension colonial, cinematic gaze, placing his lifeless body on display again and again in a proliferation of his suffering. According to John Rieder, "The colonial gaze distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at" (7). In discussing lynching in America, R.L. Harris argues that "there is an issue with the way that the black body has been viewed in this country" because "the gaze is primarily on the lynch victim" rather than on the lynch mob (131). According to R.L. Harris, this problematic perspective has made "it [. . .] possible to violate the black body with impunity, almost without fear of any type of punishment" (131). In contrast, the 1990 remake seems to critique this gaze, not only because Barbara is critical of the way the white militia handles the zombies, but also because, while the remake reproduces similar still images at the end, it intersperses them with shots of Barbara's eyes gazing outwards at the viewer (see fig. 14). Because the film suggests that

Figure 14: A screengrab of Barbara from *Night of the Living Dead*, 1990.

[46] For more information on the relationship between convict leasing and neo-slavery, see, Childs; James.

[47] In a 1969 interview with *Interview* Magazine, George A. Romeo admits that they had the budget for colour but chose black and white for its "flat, somber attitude" (Ork and Abagnalo 4). However, in a 1972 interview with *Filmmakers Newsletter*, he claims it was due to the budget (Block 12). He does go on to note that they deliberately wanted "that flat kind of graininess" to "create a depressing or oppressing air" (Block 11).

Barbara's gaze is upon the burning pyre of bodies and the white militia mishandling these bodies, as Barbara gazes at us, the viewer becomes implicated in the white militia's actions.

Steven Shaviro calls the white militia in the original *Night of the Living Dead* "implicitly racist" (12), William Terry Ork and George Abagnalo refer to them as "Real rednecks" (4), and Coleman and Harris believe that Ben's death in the end looks suspiciously like a lynch mob: "They never even realize their mistake, casually tossing his limp body onto the pyre of dead-again zombies in an unnerving scene straight out of the days of lynch mob picnics" (Coleman and Harris 24). Operating within the carceral continuum, the film highlights that despite Ben being capable and surviving up to the moment when the zombies seem to be eradicated, he still cannot survive white supremacy. Lampert-Weissig calls the ending "non-redemptive" (22) because Ben cannot liberate himself from the carceral continuum despite being the most capable character in the film. The 1990 remake, however, changes the ending; Ben is not killed by the white milia. During a fight with Harry where they each put a bullet into the other, Ben barricades himself in the basement (a place he has resisted entering throughout the film) while Harry barricades himself in the attic. Later, Barbara returns with the militia, and after they break down the door to the basement, a zombified Ben emerges, and then the militiamen shoot him. Ben's *initial* death is not at the hands of the white militia, but the disposal of his body is the same as that of its source narrative and becomes amalgamated into Dubuisson's "images of suffering." In this manner, "the Black guy" had fully transformed into the monster that the American imaginary constructed him to be before the white militia arrived, justifying his death at their hands, similar to the "post-moretem virality" I discussed in the Introduction. Thus, while the 1990 film's representation of Barbara's gaze exposes and somewhat challenges the racial dynamic, Ben's death undermines it and still reinforces the original's problematic ending.

Much has already been written about how *Night of the Living Dead* is figured in relation to the Civil Rights Movement in America.[48] Recognizing that the film was released in this context, and in the context of uprisings in the wake of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, and the larger revolutionary fervor of 1968, and *Night of the Living Dead*'s interventions—as problematic as we have seen they are—are still contextually challenging to the *status quo,* as Todd makes clear. American trust in the government in general was in

[48] See: Cohen "Grey"; Crump; Wetmore; Van Horn.

decline by the time *Night of the Living Dead* was released due to their mishandling of the Vietnam War and Watergate (Waxman). This lack of trust is evident with Ben in the film when the survivors discover a radio in the farmhouse. The radio states, "these are the facts as we know them. There is an epidemic of mass murder being committed by a virtual army of unidentified assassins. The murders are taking place in villages, cities, rural homes and suburbs with no apparent pattern or reason." With the proliferation of Civil Rights protests across the nation, the zombies must have been eerily resonant to audiences in 1968. As the radio broadcast plays, Ben performs the actions in tandem with the voiceover. As the radio describes the "assassins" or "monsters," Ben gazes out the window, affirming the descriptions from the radio to be true. As the radio claims that "the authorities" have no idea how to handle the situation, Ben is building a fire in the fireplace, covering it with fuel, and lighting it in a scene reminiscent of the final burning pyre of bodies created by the "authorities" (*Night of the Living Dead*). Finally, as the radio recommends "private citizens" to lock themselves in their homes or places of employment, Ben has boarded up most of the windows in the farmhouse (*Night*). Ben abides by everything the radio suggests, yet he is punished for his blind faith in the authorities when they shoot him at the end of the film. Crump calls *Night of the Living Dead* "an apolitical film loaded with unintentionally political signifiers […] a pliable story open to reinterpretation no matter the era."

More than this "unintentional politics," as we have seen, Romero's film is a contradictory product of a revolutionary period: repeating the stereotypes of "the Black guy" in horror film even as it challenges them. As such, the film highlights America's own contradictions when dealing with race. *Night of the Living Dead*—and thus "the Black guy" and the modern zombie—clearly had direct comments to make on race at a time when America was reconsidering its dominant narrative of race relations, or at least of white-Black relations. McAlister believes that Ben's "role is striking, coming in 1968 as it does, in its portrayal of black male leadership and calm authority, at a time when most black males in film were peripheral at best, viciously stereotyped at worst" (478). In *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror*, moreover, Todd admits, "Duane Jones' performance stood out for me. By that point, I knew I wanted to be an actor, and I said, 'okay, I was gonna be fearless.' [Ben's] slapping white people upside the head. He's killing white zombie after white zombie after white zombie. This had to be horrifying to racists." Todd's analysis demonstrates why

Ben is so transformative. There is no singular moment in the 1960s that shaped the American imaginary. Rather, horror films and the manner in which race was represented in them were largely informed by a combination of the Civil Rights Movement and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the Silent Majority, the Space Race, the collapsing nuclear family, the Summer of Love, and the Baby Boomers coming of age—there are so many shoots and roots in the rhizombie. In *Night of the Living Dead*, "the American family eats itself, the heterosexual couple burns and the proactive protagonist, who is also black, is destroyed by militiamen unable to recognize his humanity" (Blake 225). The 1990 remake does much the same with its canny reflections on the racist gaze of American horror film and society even as it violently renders Ben once again as an object of racist violence. In essence, *Night of the Living Dead* is the history of America.

To return to Peele, then, if Romero "started it," it's clear he did not "finish" horror's meditation of and reflections on American white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Leaping ahead to Peele's time, then, we have to ask, who exactly is "the Black guy" when read in a post-Obama, post-George Floyd, BLM-fueled America? To answer this question, a thorough exploration of how the Black protagonist—or secondary character—differs from Ben in Romero's other zombie films is required, because regardless of how capable, well-spoken, intelligent, or morally superior the Black guy is, they always seem to die in American zombie cinema. If they do not die first, we can bet, like Ben, they will at least die last.

Dining with a View: Gated Communities and Denying Black Bodies

Land of the Dead is the fourth film in Romero's zombie canon, and it shifts the construction of "the Black guy" with the inclusion of a Black, sentient zombie named Big Daddy who successfully gains access to spaces that previously barred Black bodies. Like *Night of the Living Dead*, *Land of the Dead* also takes place in Pennsylvania, but the events occur in the city of Pittsburgh many years after the initial zombie outbreak. The survivors have established a safe zone consisting of three distinct spaces: the first includes the world populated by zombies, represented as areas outside of the Pittsburgh city walls constructed to keep the zombies out; the second is the Green Zone, which consists of everything at ground level within the city walls and is inhabited by working-class survivors; and finally, rising

above all other buildings within this refuge is the tall tower called Fiddler's Green inhabited solely by white upper-class survivors. In the film, the three protagonists—Cholo (a Latinx man), Riley (a white man), and Big Daddy (a Black zombie)—desire a better existence, one that is contingent upon moving from their current status—signified by the space in which they initially reside in the film—to something different. Cholo has been saving his earnings from the work he does for Kaufman—the owner of Fiddler's Green—and he desires entrance into the tower. Riley desires moving from the Green Zone to the space outside the walls altogether: "maybe Canada" (*Land of the Dead*). Big Daddy seems to desire a better place for himself and his fellow zombies by moving ever closer to, and ultimately taking over the Green Zone as well as Fiddler's Green. The film ends with all three protagonists obtaining their desires, although perhaps not exactly in the way they initially expect. After rescuing several survivors from the Green Zone, Riley leaves Pittsburgh, but only after he blows up the gates to the community. Big Daddy successfully takes over both the Green Zone and Fiddler's Green. Cholo, though, is bitten and decides to let himself turn into a zombie, stating, "I always wanted to see how the other half lives" (*Land*). Cholo's obvious joke is on point for my argument: "the other half" is simultaneously the monster and the rich white guy. Cholo's statement, though, foreshadows that Fiddler's Green will ultimately fall to the zombies anyway, so in the end, he may get both results, as the zombie revolution reverses the roles of privilege, by becoming a zombie, he also gains access to Fiddler's Green.

Big Daddy is relatively unique in Romero's canon for his sentience.[49] Big Daddy seems to communicate with the other zombies using grunts, and he shows signs of anger when the human survivors kill his fellow zombies. Throughout the film, he leads the other zombies into Pittsburgh, killing and displacing the rich white folks in an inversion of *Get Out*'s transmutation process. What *Land of the Dead* demonstrates is that Black bodies can ultimately inhabit those spaces previously denied to them. And, as Big Daddy demonstrates, this access can occur despite not having a voice, working a menial labour job, and still being figured as monster. At the end of the film, Riley has the chance to shoot Big Daddy as the latter stands upon a precipice outside Fiddler's Green, but he refrains from doing so,

[49] There is Bub from *Day of the Dead* (1985), who is being "trained" by the doctors, and by the end of the film, manages to successfully use a gun. There is also a sentient zombie in *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985), which is a film often mistaken to be a part of Romero's zombie canon given its title, but the film is directed by Dan O'Bannon, and Romero did not play a part in the creation of this film.

claiming, “they’re just looking for a place to go … same as us,” quickly followed by releasing all the “sky flowers”—the fireworks they had been using to distract zombies on their supply runs (*Land*). In letting Big Daddy and the other zombies claim the former safe zone as their own, Riley realises the zombies are not monsters and constructs them as equal beings.

As briefly noted in my Introduction, 9/11 transformed how zombie narratives as well as spaces in America are constructed, resulting in the prevalence of the invasion narrative, a narrative that *Land of the Dead* critiques. Sylvia Söderlind, citing Donald Pease, claims that “since 9/11 … [America] has become a ‘state fantasy’ of a ‘Global Homeland’ whose most vulnerable citizens are no longer seen as in need of protection but as potential security threats” (8). Nowhere is this more evident than in the rise of zombie films after 9/11. In many of these films, the boundaries between America and the rest of the world dissolve, resulting in small communities who struggle to survive against each other. The collapse of recognizable borders results in a similar collapse of citizenship; thus, the survivors are both “vulnerable citizens” and “potential security threats.” Linnie Blake points out that

> as the housing bubble has collapsed and ten years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan have transformed the United States ‘into the world’s biggest debtor and stripped millions of their jobs, pensions and dreams of home ownership,’ the zombie apocalypse has become a particularly potent metaphor, the monster encapsulating the terrors of our age of infrastructural collapse, societal degeneration, mismanaged pandemic scenarios and governmental indifference and corruption. (233)

Many of Blake’s scenarios point to the complex entanglements that characterize the rhizombie and which appear in *Land of the Dead*, featuring a kind of real estate scramble where the survivors (and zombies) seek to move from one distinct space to another on a trajectory that presumably goes inward and up. Below, I closely examine each space to articulate the rhizombic interrelations between movement, access to spaces, and the manner in which “the Black guy” transforms and is transformed by these spaces.

The Green Zone in *Land of the Dead* is inhabited by the working class. The term “Green Zone” most commonly refers to an area in central Baghdad during the US occupation of 2003-2018; this area was “a city within a city” surrounded by concrete walls and barbed

wire and was often called the "ultimate gated community" (Garrels). The concept of the "gated community" represents what it means to be a "successful American"—and specifically a successful white, middle-class American—because it signifies access to a desired space that promises security and signifies economic success. But, the gated community is always at risk to those that desire to invade the space. Later in this dissertation, I discuss Grant's novel *Feed* and how gated communities are "security theatre" used to maintain America's "culture of fear." The same idea applies to *Land of the Dead*. Setha Low states that the "desire for security, community, and 'niceness,' as well as wanting to live near people like themselves because of a fear of 'others' and of crime is […] expressed by most residents living in gated communities" (9). Gated communities are predicated on the idea of excluding Others, namely the infected and Black people, signified by Big Daddy. Life in the Green Zone is therefore "security theatre" because it promises safety, surrounded by walls that are constantly staffed by men with guns, but it reveals how "security theatre" is implicated in maintaining a kind of racialized oppression.

Riley, meanwhile, wants to move beyond walls altogether, longing for the idea of "a world with no fences" (*Land*)—or a world without such exclusion of the Other, which cannot exist in the Green Zone, or in the narrative of the gated community, and definitely not in the narrative of the "white picket fence" that laid the foundation for the gated community. The white picket fence is a symbol of what it means to be a "successful suburban American," and according to Michael Dolan, is marked by "an imaginary all-white realm." Since 1876, the white picket fence was a "totem of middle-class prosperity," and even when suburbanites could not afford to whitewash their fences, spending money to do so was of the utmost importance (Dolan). Whitewashed fences, both literally and metaphorically, were about keeping the Other out. At the end of *Land of the Dead,* Riley steals a two-million-dollar reinforced military vehicle that he uses to escape the Green Zone, so even as Riley rejects the "security theatre" of the Green Zone and its many material and metaphoric fences, he still maintains a sort of separation from the Other.

Conversely, Cholo desires access out of the Green Zone and into Fiddler's Green. In an early conversation in the film, Cholo says, "I'm gonna have my own place" in Fiddler's Green, and Riley responds with, "you're dreaming Cholo, they won't let you in there, they won't let me in there, we're the wrong kind" (*Land*). Cholo is represented as Latinx;

therefore, Riley's statement "they won't let me in there" highlights how his own clearly white identity is not welcome, and therefore Cholo's Latinx identity is even less welcome. Riley's statement reflects how both race and class are factors in the exclusion of certain bodies from accessing certain spaces. For bodies to enter Fiddler's Green, they must be homogenous in both race (white) and class (upper). Therefore, Big Daddy, who is infected, Black, and a member of the working-class—when the film opens, he is dressed as a mechanic and standing out front of a garage in a run-down neighbourhood—would never be provided access to a space like Fiddler's Green.

Advertising is the tool used throughout the film to maintain "security theatre" and the promise of the possibility of entrance into Fiddler's Green. In *Land of the Dead,* a video constantly plays within the walls of both Fiddler's Green and the Green Zone. The video depicts white upper-class, finely dressed couples smiling and laughing, accompanied by audio of a disembodied voice that reinforces it as an ideal living space (see fig. 15):

> Life goes on at Fiddler's Green in the heart of one of America's oldest and greatest cities, bordered on three sides by mighty rivers, Fiddler's Green offers luxury living in the grand ol' style. Dine at one of six fine restaurants, look for that perfect gift in our fully stocked shopping mall…isn't it time, isn't it your time for Fiddler's Green? (*Land*)

Fiddler's Green is established as a resort through phrases such as "luxury living" and "six fine restaurants," gesturing toward the idea that it is a vacation destination—a temporary respite from the disorder, and Others, outside its walls. Luxury resorts are typically spaces that promise those who enter that they will experience unlimited wining, dining, and shopping: the American Dream. According to sailor's lore, "those who die at sea can spend the afterlife in Fiddler's Green, which has all the benefits of a rowdy tavern (endless music and dancing, bottomless tankards of rum) without any bills (or hangovers) to bear" (Eyers 57). Similarly, the advertisement boasts a "fully stocked shopping mall" in a way that suggests there is nothing existing outside this

Figure 15: A screengrab of the advertisement for Fiddler's Green, 2005.

space that its citizens could possibly desire, and, in fact, the only time survivors flee from Fiddler's Green is after the zombies have infiltrated the space. And where do these goods come from? They are brought in by working-class people, such as Cholo. When Cholo initially expresses his desire to move to Fiddler's Green, Kaufman, who owns the tower, responds, "this is an extremely desirable location, space is very limited" to which Cholo responds by saying "you mean restricted" (*Land*). The exchange between Cholo and Kaufman reveals how access to certain spaces and keeping the Other out is coded in the language of luxury shopping. Cholo's reaction is not to argue with Kaufman's assertion that space itself is limited, only that the discourse constructing this space is controlled by the rich white population. In this moment, Cholo realises that for Fiddler's Green to remain "luxurious" it must remain homogenous in terms of race and class. Cholo is not seeking the security or sustenance like other survivors*;* he is seeking an entirely different embodiment promised to him in the advertising for Fiddler's Green. However, when Big Daddy enters Fiddler's Green, he becomes both consumer (eating human flesh) and producer (creating more zombies through his bite), but he does not consume the many goods in the "fully stocked shopping mall"; instead, he consumes the shoppers.

The zombies notice Fiddler's Green rising above the Pittsburgh landscape because it is the only space that is lit up (see fig. 16); it is quite literally a representation of John Winthrop's "city upon a hill." The discourse of the shining beacon associated with the "city upon a hill" has been repeated since Winthrop's 1630 sermon; for example, Ronald Reagan stated, in his farewell address, "America is a shining city upon a hill whose beacon light guides freedom-loving people everywhere," and in 2008, Barack Obama claimed he would restore America as "'that shining beacon on a hill'" (qtd. in Söderlind 1).

Figure 16: A screengrab of Fiddler's Green in the distance from *Land of the Dead,* 2005.

The "city upon a hill" rhetorically defines America as a desirable space, and the zombies, led by Big Daddy, seek access to this space. The fact that the zombies are drawn to the "shining

beacon on a hill" suggests that, in tandem with their "need" to consume humans is the "want" to consume these humans in a better space—fine dining with a view.

The film ends with Big Daddy and his band of zombies successfully infiltrating and taking over not just the Green Zone but also Fiddler's Green. Part of this is due to Kaufman's hubris that the monsters are "mindless" and incapable of working together (*Land*), not unlike Sintil, the plantation owner in *Dézafi.* "Security theatre" is required in zombie films like *Land of the Dead* that feature "the Black guy" even if he is a zombie because maintaining white superiority is predicated on consistently denying access to Black bodies, unless, of course, they are "the help." After all, the only Black body that appears in Fiddler's Green is Kaufman's butler. While the spaces outside most safe zones in zombie narratives are overrun with monsters, the spaces inside—so long as they are carefully controlled by "security theatre"—call for their own destruction. Post-9/11 zombie narratives then posit a way of dealing with those "vulnerable citizens" who are also "internal security threats" while maintaining its "culture of fear." They control those within their walls, but only if the Black zombie stays on their side of the white picket fence.

Conclusion: The Black Guy Doesn't Die

In Romero's zombieverse, "the Black guy" resists many of the anti-Black stereotypes that initially proliferated in horror film, but Ben stills dies in the end. In contrast, *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* transform "the Black guy" trope when Peter and John respectively not only survive, but fly off, manifest-destiny style, into the unknown, having both saved the white woman in their respective films. While *Land of the Dead* gives us an infected Black body, he is the first of his kind in Romero's zombieverse not only to be sentient, but also to successfully gain access to spaces that previously denied Black people. Romero therefore significantly transformed "the Black guy" trope.

So, to firmly answer how "Romero started it" for Peele, let us return to *Get Out.* Unlike the alternate ending, the theatrical ending to *Get Out* resists the carceral continuum and solidifies the "it" that Peele claims Romero started. The theatrical ending still shows Chris and Rose fighting in the middle of the road in front of the Armitage house, and it still depicts the blue and red flashing lights of a police car pulling up to witness this dangerous

looking Black man standing over a white woman. However, as moments of suspense pass, the driver-side door of the police car opens to reveal Chris' Black friend, Rod, stepping out. Unlike the alternate ending, the theatrical ending suggests justice for Chris. Despite the plausibility of the alternate ending in representing the Black experience in America, Peele decided to go with the ending that posits Chris as "a hero… that gives us an escape…gives us a positive feeling when we leave this movie" (qtd. in Lawrence), gives us a chance to get out. Peele admits that he changed the ending because "by the time I was shooting it, it was quite clear the world had shifted, racism was being dealt with, people were woke, and people needed a release and a hero" ("Get Out | Director Commentary"). In fact, "The term 'woke horror' emerged in early 2017 in the rush to categorize Jordan Peele's *Get Out,* seemingly satisfying a desperate need to make sense of its existence" (Coleman and Harris 90). Similarly, Padraig Cotter argues, "a hopeful ending implies that resolution to the film's real-life social issues is possible." All of this points to a desire to present an escape from the carceral matrix that polices and contains Black bodies, in a similar way to that which we see in Big Daddy's actions in *Land of the Dead.*

This escape is also an element of the rhizombie's multiplicitous engagement across the field of social issues and institutions. While Cotter's hopefulness might be a little idealistic, Annie J. Rohan and Kathleen Rice Simpson posit "racism as a public health crisis affecting the mental, spiritual, economic, and physical health of Black people" (5). The rhizombie engages with the idea of racism as a "public health crisis" to argue that it affects every-body. Rohan and Simpson go on to argue that the death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police in 2020 "marked a breaking point in the recognition of systemic racism and discrimination" in America (5). *Get Out* may have been released prior to the killing of Floyd but, perhaps Peele built on the "it" that he claims Romero started in important ways that predict the reaction to Floyd's murder. After all, Peele won an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay, making him the first Black writer in history to win an Oscar (Mylrea). The "originality" of Peele's screenplay might just be the fact that "the Black guy" not only survives, but he escapes the carceral continuum altogether.

Chris' escape is fueled only in part by Rod's appearance. Chris discovers that there is a history of transmutation—of neo-slavery—as well as other Black victims, and this discovery ultimately leads to liberation from the Armitage transplantation house. It is the

recognition of neo-slavery's history, combined with Chris' predecessors using their voices whenever possible, that provides Chris with the best chance of resisting full transmutation. For example, when Chris takes a picture of Andre/Logan King, the flash temporarily liberates Andre from "the Sunken Place" and he yells to Chris to "get out!" While not specifically using the term "carceral continuum," W. E. B. Du Bois argues that the conditions of racism within the US create a psychological "double consciousness" for Black people. Du Bois argues that, in America, being Black means "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others […] One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (13). Andre, Walter, and Georgina, the victims of transmutation in *Get Out*, embody "a new version of Du Boisian double consciousness" (Parrish 114). Like the victims, double consciousness presumes that the "negro" and the implicitly always already white "American" are at odds within the Black psyche. However, during Chris' incarceration in the Armitage transplantation house, he finally sees himself as a singular being. Unlike "the failure to represent" that Parrish notes in relation to Chris' inability to take action during the rest of the film, by temporarily releasing Andre from "the Sunken Place" and suffering through the first parts of the transmutation process himself, Chris not only "witnesses" the neo-slavery "catastrophes" of his ancestors, but he must experience them himself. For instance, while strapped to a chair listening to Jeremy—his new "slave master"—explain the process, Chris is picking stuffing, which looks similar to cotton, out of the arm of the chair, something Parrish also notes (129). To survive and evade incarceration in this world, Chris must return to his own repressed history of slavery. What I mean by this is that he stuffs the picked cotton, a signifier of slavery, in his ears to drown out the sound of the teacup that is used to banish him to the "Sunken Place."

Get Out can be figured as a zombie film, but beyond that, why does it speak so well to Romero's works and vice versa? *Night of the Living Dead* arguably transformed Black representation in horror cinema (Coleman and Harris 144), but *Get Out* takes it much further, obviously. Camille Moore compares the two films but argues that *Get Out* "changed the narrative," referring to how Chris, unlike Ben in *Night of the Living Dead*, does not die in the end. Chris "became the survivor that Ben didn't have a chance to become" (Camille Moore). Camille Moore goes on to claim "It's a triumphant ending and I think it really shows how far

Black horror has come and how far the Black community has come as well. We are the creators, leaders and heroes of our own stories." Likewise, Coleman and Harris note, "When it comes to Black horror, *Get Out* is now the standard by which all other social satires are judged" (215). Both films are "socially conscious horror," and Crump argues that *Get Out* is "*Night of the Living Dead*'s most important successor, for validating *Night of the Living Dead*'s significance." Perhaps it is only coincidence that both are zombie films that also shifted the body of the zombie—from Haitian to modern and back to Haitian, and without the sacrifice of Ben and the various entanglements of the rhizombie, perhaps Chris never would have made it out alive.

CHAPTER 3

Epidemic:

Historical Contagion, Settler Zombies, and Haunting Back

> *"All this time, the one thing that was killing us ended up saving our lives. History, ain't it a bitch?"* (*The Dead Can't Dance*)

In the 2022 Inuit-made horror/science fiction film *Slash/Back*, a group of Inuit teens navigating life in Pangniturang, Nunavut, a remote arctic community, find themselves faced with the task of saving their friends and families from an alien invasion. Like many alien invasion narratives,[50] the aliens in *Slash/Back* do not only invade the land, they also invade the bodies of the animals and Indigenous people inhabiting that land. While *Slash/Back* is not classified as a zombie film, the aliens function similar to zombies, and the film addresses issues comparable to those that inform narratives in the subgenre. For example, the first zombies who shuffled onto the screen—the dark-skinned, enslaved, creatures in *White Zombie*—are embodiments of the "trope of losing one's independence to a greater power" (Bishop, *How Zombies* 8). While the "greater power" in *White Zombie* is largely representative of the Depression-era imagery of long food lines, "a tedious job, a bleak economy, or a helpless government" (Bishop, *How Zombies* 8), *Slash/Back* is a colonial narrative whose "greater power" is the threat of forced assimilation. The aliens—a not so thinly veiled metaphor for colonizers—take over Indigenous bodies and force them to attack one another in a manner quite reminiscent of a zombie pathogen. In the end, the young protagonists in *Slash/Back* succeed in destroying the aliens only with the use of traditional Inuit knowledge that they learned from their parents and their Elders. *Slash/Back* therefore embodies the blending of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing and being with the themes and tropes that define contemporary genres and subgenres, such as horror and science fiction, alien and zombie narratives. Many Indigenous authors and filmmakers are taking up this blending with the goal of disrupting national narratives that are predicated on reinscribing colonialism again and again upon the bodies, lands, and cultures of Indigenous peoples. In "Is There an Indigenous Gothic?", Michelle Burnham argues that Indigenous Gothic

[50] *Puppet Masters* (1994), *The Faculty* (1998), *Starship Troopers 2: Hero of the Federation* (2004), and *The Host* (2013), just to name a few.

narratives "represent Native American contributions to – but also Native American interventions in – American Gothic" (228), and I might add, Canadian Gothic.

Building on the discussion of the racist and colonial gaze in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on the Indigenous part of the rhizombie as an anti-colonial approach, where I analyse entanglements between contagion and the racial oppression of Indigenous peoples. In this chapter, I address how Indigenous-made zombie narratives use a technique Teresa A. Goddu has termed "haunting back," which allows these narratives to interrupt Canadianism and its role in ongoing colonisation, disrupting historical contagion and reclaiming bits of the history and national narratives that have silenced, misrepresented, and caused violence to Indigenous nations. While there are still only a handful of Indigenous-made zombie narratives in existence, including Lisa Jackson's short film "Savage" (2009), Rodrick Pocowatchit's film *The Dead Can't Dance* (2010), Richard Van Camp's short story "On the Wings of this Prayer" (2012), Stephen Graham Jones's novel *Zombie Bake-Off* (2012) and his short story "Chapter Six" (2014), and Jacques L. Condor/Maka Tai Meh's short story "Those Beneath the Bog" (2014),[51] I focus on Jeff Barnaby's *Blood Quantum* (2019), a film in which Indigenous peoples are immune to the zombie pathogen. *Blood Quantum* haunts back against many Indigenous centered conflicts, but I look primarily at how the film responds to the Cabot foundation myth, the 1981 raids at Restigouche, the 1990 Oka Crisis, and the settler practice of identification known as blood quantum. Ultimately, Indigenous-made zombie narratives blend traditional Indigenous knowledge with contemporary monsters to unveil how the history of the ideology informing the national narratives of Turtle Island (North America) is predicated on Indigenous oppression. Furthermore, these narratives are represented as contagion. By haunting back, Indigenous storytellers unsettle these national narratives and respond to Billy-Ray Belcourt's experimental approach to decolonisation: "dreaming up worlds that can bear all of us, worlds that slip-slide into others without disavowing their hybrid alterities" (22), worlds populated by zombies and entangled in the rhizombie.

[51] There are a number of narratives about zombie-like figures, such as the windigo/wendigo/wheetago, in addition to those listed here. Additionally, many of these narratives draw on the language and allude to these Indigenous zombie-like figures. However, only the narratives listed here use the term "zombie," and it could be problematic to assume Indigenous figures as zombies without the authors or filmmakers deliberately drawing attention to them.

Historical Contagion: This Will Just Take a Minute…

One of the first *Canadian Heritage Minutes* released when the docuseries hit cable television in 1991 represents the 1497 voyage of John Cabot sailing from Bristol, England to Canada aboard the *Matthew* (see fig. 17). According to the *Minute,* Cabot and his crew were stopped by cod so dense that, as the Cabot character states at the end of the video, it would "be enough to feed our kingdom […] until the end of time" ("John Cabot"). The discourse with which this *Heritage Minute* constructs the narrative of "discovery" suggests that Canada sees itself as a land of plenty that provides "enough" for all its inhabitants. In fact, the use of the term "Kingdom" suggests that food will be plentiful not just for England, but for all parts of its dominion, including its colonies. However, this narrative is what Joanne Wright would call a "foundation myth":

Figure 17: The Atlantic salmon "stay" the ship in the John Cabot *Heritage Minute,* 1991.

> Foundation myths are the primary organizing myths of nations: they establish a common history, a common origin, and a national identity. Their significance stems from the idea that "The sense of 'whence we came' is central to the definition of 'who we are.'" […] They mythologize and sanctify an imaginary beginning to the nation, or take the historical "facts" of the nation's origins and legitimate them from a particular political perspective. (20)

Cabot's claim to discovery had already been legitimized prior to the release of the *Heritage Minute*; however, its appearance within the *Minutes* solidifies his claim as part of Canadian heritage. As a result, it becomes a primary organizing narrative of Canadian nation building. Therefore, arguably, the Cabot character's statement summarizes a central element in the national narrative of Canada—that it provides enough to feed the Kingdom until the end of time. However, in laying claim to Canada's foundation and positing itself as a common

history via the collective pronoun "our," it erases, perhaps as part of its promise of consumption, the Indigenous peoples and nations across Turtle Island.

The *Heritage Minutes* generally play a significant ideological role in shaping the popular narrative of Canada due to the content and frequency with which they air. The *Minutes* originally appeared on major cable television networks and prior to films at Cineplex theatres (Reid). By the late 1990s, they were also included in home video releases of Universal Studios films (Reid), so they were initially undeniably designed to reach a large portion of the Canadian viewing population. Because of their status as "history," the "Foundation offer[ed] them free to TV stations, and since they confer valuable Canadian content points, their total exposure nationwide now runs at more than thirteen hours of air-time every month" (Christopher Moore 67),[52] which equated to approximately 780 *Minutes* per month at the height of their viewing. While they no longer seem to air on cable television or within the theatre, Historica Canada still produces a few new ones each year ("Heritage Minutes #partofourheritage"). The *Minutes* are so well known that many Canadians can quote their taglines, and because the length of the *Minutes* is similar to a commercial, we cannot deny the fact that audiences consume them within a commercial framework. The *Minutes* therefore sell a part of Canada and Canadian identity. For instance, Emily West argues that the *Heritage Minutes* are designed to "fill the gaps in Canadian collective memory" to buttress the nation by constructing a national pride that functions as an ideological defense mechanism protecting Canada from "threats" (West 213-14). The producers seek to achieve this by presenting the illusion that the *Heritage Minutes* are "unmediated" and "multicultural," thus encouraging a more authentic relationship between Canadian viewers and their "history" as well as to avoid appearing as if they further a particular political agenda (West 214). However, as Joanne Wright points out, foundation myths are always already rooted in a political perspective (20). Therefore, we can turn to Glen Norcliffe, who argues that the central questions we need to ask when approaching histories, such as those outlined in the *Canadian Heritage Minutes*, are "whose history?" and "which history?" (97).

[52] Christopher Moore's article was originally published in 1995 at the height of viewership.

When it comes to whose history is represented by the *Heritage Minutes*, the histories of Indigenous peoples are often excluded or misrepresented. For example, in the Cabot *Minute*, Cabot speaks directly to King Henry VII of England and his royal court; therefore, the "our" is not necessarily inclusive of those outside the royal court. In fact, because "our" possesses the "Kingdom" in the tagline, it can only include the colonizers—those who possess the kingdom—and this excludes the colonized. When it comes to Indigenous representation, of the 96 *Minutes* currently in existence,[53] only ten intersect with Indigenous peoples, and many of these misrepresent them and reinforce negative stereotypes. The 2005 *Minute* relaying the story of Ojibwe military hero Tommy Prince, for example, dedicates more screen time to depictions of Canadian military signifiers, and the dialogue presents a list of his personal issues, including alcoholism, poverty, and "family troubles" (see fig. 18; "Tommy Prince"). The episode refers to all of this more than it does to Prince himself. While it can be argued that these "troubles" plague many veterans upon returning from war, another *Heritage Minute*, "Home from the Wars," focuses solely on the benefits afforded to veterans (all of whom appear to be white). This latter *Minute* aired the same year as "Tommy Prince." While this latter *Minute* does not explicitly state that Indigenous veterans are excluded from government assistance after the war, the dearth of visible minorities in the *Minute* suggests otherwise.

Figure 18: A close-up of Prince's uniform in the *Heritage Minute*, 2005.

In addition to a lack of representation and a focus on negative stereotypes, the manner in which viewers have re-enacted the *Minutes* becomes a kind of cultural appropriation. The 1993 release of "Inukshuk" represents an Inuit family helping a wounded RCMP officer (see fig. 19). After its release, it was met with Canadians quoting the tagline, "now the people will know we were here" (Ruhl 13) as well as a proliferation of Inuksuit (plural for Inukshuk) being erected across the country. According to Tiffany Treadway, the cultural significance of Inuksuit is for Inuit peoples to be "*seen.*" Inuksuit represent that an Inuit group or Inuk

[53] At the time of writing this in 2022.

individual was present on the land, and these markings denote spiritual, hunting, and fishing locations (Treadway; Stewart et al 198; Hallendy 48). However, similar to the collective pronoun "our" from the Cabot *Minute*, the question of who "we" includes determines who is really "seen" in the Inuksuit. With the Inuit nation comprising approximately 4% of the Indigenous population in Canada, meaning they make up only 0.17% of the total Canadian population ("Annual Report to Parliament 2020"), it can be assumed that the majority of Canadians who repeat the tagline are most likely not Inuit. Therefore, the tagline of the "Inukshuk" *Minute* might be accurate, but the combination of the exclusionary "we," the past tense in the tagline, and the disembodied echo at the end of the *Minute* contributes to the problematic vanishing Indian trope.[54]

Figure 19: The ending of the Inukshuk *Heritage Minute*, 1993.

The proliferation of Inuksuit by non-Inuit peoples across Canada makes silent the original cultural significance of the cairns and replaces them with meanings signified in the *Heritage Minutes*. For some Inuit communities, Inuksuit are erected at specific angles to provide direction (Treadway); however, Chuck Miller, the superintendent of Killarney Provincial Park in Ontario, notes how the "invasion" of Inuksuit leads hikers astray (Dube). Inuksuit are constructed as a kind of colonisation here, not unlike the aliens in *Slash/Back*, and are consequently having the opposite effect for which they were created. Erecting Inuksuit became so common that Rebecca Dube precisely calls it "an invasive species," and park officials across the country have released pleas to the public to stop building them (Dube).[55] In some cases, the media has reduced Inuksuit to "rock graffiti" (Lundberg). Unfortunately, Inuksuit have been discursively propelled into the language of colonisation in

[54] The vanishing Indian trope emerged in nineteenth-century American narratives beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner (Shanley 277). The trope represents Indigenous peoples as disappearing to the point where the people and culture will eventually disappear entirely.

[55] The situation has become so prolific and uncontrollable that "Parks Canada, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) all have regulations or policies that discourage or prohibit" building them (Lundberg).

a way that makes it difficult for Inuit people to engage with them in culturally significant ways and posits the culture of Inuit people as invading white settlement. The Inuksuit, whether they are officially built by Inuit people or not, are haunting spaces that have been deemed white.

Miller admits that he and his staff dismantle the Inuksuit whenever they find them (Dube), but according to Piita Irniq, the destruction of an Inukshuk can mark the early death of whoever built it (25). Thus, the lack of cultural understanding surrounding the Inukshuk is harmful to both Inuit and non-Inuit peoples, and this cultural misunderstanding can be traced back to the *Heritage Minutes.* Christopher Moore argues the *Minutes* leave "a thousand things unexplained, undiscussed, barely evoked" (67). Thus, the only thing viewers really learn from "Inukshuk" is how to build one and how to repeat the tagline. It is no surprise that the *Minute* appropriates and rewrites the cultural narrative of Inuksuit, since "they [the Minutes] were intended primarily not to explain historical events and facts, but to promote Canadian national unity and identity" (Peters 265). A simple, easily memorable tagline and a structure that can be erected virtually anywhere in Canada accomplishes this. Inuksuit, and by extension the *Minutes* and all that they signify, have therefore become a kind of contagion infecting Canada's landscape.

Ultimately, the exclusion or misrepresentation of oppressed groups from the national narrative stems, in part, from the fact that Canada is considered to be "multicultural." Erin Peters notes how "Canadian national identity has long been fraught with plurality, leading to a noticeable lack of any unifying national culture or distinctiveness" (250); therefore, for Canada's plurality and diversity to flourish, a national identity cannot exist. Peters goes on to note how "In a country of so much cultural plurality, the concept of a universal Canadian cultural identity is controversial to say the least, and most certainly contested by Canada's many social groups" (255). This is because national identity in Canada either already excludes certain groups or is inherently contradictory. I argue that both are true. To have a national identity requires the erasure, homogenization, or subsuming of Canada's many subgroups into one Canadian identity, yet Canadian identity is posited as a plurality and as such, already requires diversity and resists said erasure, homogenization, and subsuming,

leading to an inherently contradictory national identity.[56] Gothic narratives of Turtle Island demonstrate "how these contradictions contest and constitute national identity even as they are denied, the gothic tells of the historical horrors that make national identity possible yet must be repressed in order to sustain it" (Goddu "Introduction to American Gothic" 270). Therefore, the history represented by the *Heritage Minutes* is the contradictory history of whiteness that perceives itself as multicultural, infecting the Canadian imaginary with this narrative, and yet still requires the misrepresentation or erasure of Indigenous peoples to exist.

As such, we can address the stakeholders as well as the cultural inception of the *Heritage Minutes* to gain a more thorough understanding of whose history is represented by the *Minutes*. The *Minutes* were originally sponsored by the Charles R. Bronfman (CRB) Foundation Heritage Project, which was established in 1986 to "enhance Canadianism" (Rukszto 74). But what is Canadianism? This question immediately arose with Confederation in 1867 and has been an ongoing challenge to answer. John Boyd, for example, responded to it in a 1918 address at the Montreal Reform Club, stating, "Let Canadians […] be ever faithful to the national ideals formulated and enunciated by the founders of the Domion [*sic*] and let them oppose to the utmost anything that would tend to impair those ideals" (7). Boyd's emphasis on "the founders" reveals how the ideals associated with Canadianism are intimately connected to colonialism and the search for a *found*ation myth, but also, one that is set in opposition to anything and everything that threatens those ideals—a binary.

Canada uses the *Heritage Minutes* and other ideological apparatuses to rationalize the need for Canadianism and mobilize its mythologized identity against possible "threats," primarily Indigenous sovereignty.[57] For instance, Canada reportedly experienced an identity crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s because prior to 1971, it was considered to be a bilingual and bicultural country. However, when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced a multicultural policy, Canada spent the next few decades trying to reconcile multiculturalism

[56] For more information on how paradox is an inherent part of Canadian identity, see, Angus; Johnstone; Mahtani; Ryan.

[57] Louis Althusser put forth the concept of "ideological state apparatuses" in 1970 in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Althusser surmised that ideologies exist in social formations that are predicated on class struggle (1361). Ideological State Apparatuses or "ISAs represent the *form* in which the ideology of the ruling class must *necessarily* be realized, and the form in which the ideology of the ruled class must *necessarily* be measured and confronted, ideologies are not 'born' in the ISAs but from the social classes at grips in the class struggle: from their conditions of existence, their practices, their experiences of struggle, etc." (1361).

as its new national identity (Peters 255). Due to Canada's status as a "young country struggling to find an identity independent of Britain and the United States" (Metcalfe 177), it looks to its media "to define a national identity in crisis by relating the fate of particular individuals to wider political, economic, and cultural issues" (Jackson and Ponic 43), which becomes a kind of collective memory or the establishment of a Canadian imaginary. According to Erin Peters, the need for a "collective memory" rises in response to "heightened national disunity" (251); therefore, there is a correlation whereby the *Minutes* as a perceived representation of "collective memory" emerged (1991) just when Canada reached its "heightened national disunity" within an apex of tension regarding its multicultural identity. Clearly, in the *Heritage Minutes*, "the new memories being presented are seeking to define the Canadian past [biculturalism] through present-day issues [multiculturalism]. This act silences the actuality of the past in order to portray an idealized version for the purpose of constructing a desired collective memory for the sake of present and future" (Peters 261). Silencing becomes a rationalized biproduct of creating Canadian identity, and one that is naturalized via hegemony in the manner of one of its so-called parent nations—Britain. Much of British expansionism rationalizes its Imperialistic tendencies: "as the peacock's tail achieves its splendours without pigment, so Britain has achieved her empire without imperialism" (Zangwill 106). Britain required more space to accommodate its growing population, and the violence that came as a result is not posited as deliberate imperialism but rather, through the peacock simile, roots Imperialism as a natural endowment—exceptionalism. Just as the peacock's colours are not painted—they are "without pigment"—Israel Zangwill argues that Britain's expansion is natural, or at least, has been constructed that way within its national narratives.

Ultimately, the *Heritage Minutes* as a vessel of Canadianism function within a colonial program and are designed to construct and uphold an ideology exclusive of, misrepresentative of, and damaging to Indigenous nations. In the case of the Cabot *Minute*, Canadianism manifests in, first, the myth of abundance, and second, the myth of exceptionalism for Europeans coming to Turtle Island. These two myths are significantly challenged in *Blood Quantum*, but to understand the film's role in responding to the myths, we must first explore the myths themselves. The first myth, that of abundance, is evident in the representation of the cod, which are portrayed as "so thick, they stayed our ship" ("John

Cabot"), so the resources were fished as if they would never disappear. According to Sarah Praskievicz, when the focus is placed on "supply in the natural environment" as opposed to other potential stressors, such as a sudden increase in the population that consumes said supply, the myth of abundance emerges (1068). A myth of abundance mistakes a lack of resource scarcity as resource security (Praskievicz 1077-78). Essentially, a lot of cod (a lack of resource scarcity) does not constitute cod forever or cod for all (resource security), but the manner in which Cabot posits the cod as "enough" collapses this distinction and leads to the myth of abundance.

As a result of the myth, the cod—like many resources extracted from Turtle Island—were treated like a "non-renewable resource," meaning sustainability was never taken into consideration as they were being fished (Norcliffe 101). One such reason, of course, is that the settler concept of sustainability was not present at the end of the fifteenth century; however, the myth of abundance precedes the rise of settler concepts of sustainability in a way that ensures any attempt to regulate cod fishing was, is, and will continue to be ineffective. Additionally, the cod are posited only as a source of food. In no way does the Cabot character suggest the cod have additional uses; therefore, they function solely within the narrative of consumption, and any narrative of consumption—especially one lacking in sustainable discourse—I argue, falls into the trappings of overconsumption. The intersection between consumption and a lacking discourse on sustainability is where zombies—and specifically, the rhizombie—emerge within the narratives that I discuss in both this and Chapter 4.

The second myth speaks to Canadian exceptionalism in three ways: claiming initial discovery, highlighting that the cod "stayed" the ship, and ensuring the "Kingdom" is fed. According to Rachel Bryant, "Exceptionalism is the code system settler peoples have used across centuries to signify their cultural preeminence"; specifically, it refers to "the compulsive logic through which settlers from multiple states and across centuries have come to imagine themselves as deserving of the great material bounties that were supposedly bequeathed to them as they aggressively seized control of Indigenous lands" ("Canadian Exceptionalism"). Bryant goes on to note that "Canada invokes its exceptionalism when it wants to fracture and endanger lands and waterways with another oil pipeline, or when it wants to build another hydroelectric dam in Labrador that will flood and distort Innu or Inuit

hunting grounds" ("Canadian Exceptionalism"). Therefore, Canadian exceptionalism emerges as a way to rectify the imperialistic tendencies I previously noted; it is simultaneously tied to land, the exploitation of resources, the collapse of sustainability, and ongoing conflict with Indigenous peoples. As a rhizomatic process across older and recent history (and hence an apt referent for the rhizombie), this entanglement manifests in the material monster of the white zombie in Indigenous-made zombie narratives. As such, Indigenous characters, especially those immune to contagion, become the antithesis of Canadian exceptionalism; they function both as a threat to it but also a required Other for it to exist, similar to the relationship between Black bodies and white consciousnesses in *Get Out*.

The Cabot *Minute* embodies exceptionalism is the claim to initial discovery, or *Terra Nullius*, because it neglects to acknowledge the presence of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island pre-contact. The claim to *Terra Nullius* helps establish what Bryant calls "cultural preeminence" by suggesting superiority came precisely at the time of colonization ("Canadian Exceptionalism"). It is manifestly Canadian exceptionalism when Cabot states the cod "stayed" the ship because he suggests that Europeans are naturally endowed to find and stay on Turtle Island. The term "stayed" not only indicates being caught in place, but the root word "stay" suggests never leaving, so it is as if nature—the very ichthyofauna of the region—will not let Cabot leave. This "staying" leads to what Bryant would call "Settler Canadian cultural subjectivity," which is the assumption of inherent "superiority and difference" that is the cornerstone of exceptionalism—the idea that a group naturally inherits a space based on their differences from other groups within that space (*The Homing Place* 65). Bryant argues that "cultural subjectivity" in the region belongs to settlers; therefore, it excludes Indigenous peoples from partaking in it. Finally, like most colonial resources, the cod are not left on the shores of Turtle Island but are shipped back to England to ensure the "Kingdom" is fed.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the English were bringing thousands of tonnes of cod back to England (Pringle 37). The colonial narrative is linked to both the export as well as the inevitable extinction of resources. As a result, the moment Cabot saw the cod, the cod were destined to extinction. In Canada, cod fishing peaked in 1968—the same year that *Night of the Living Dead* was released—at 810,000 tonnes (Pringle 37), and then the cod industry

began to collapse.[58] In 1992, a moratorium was put in place (Norcliffe 107), but it was too late. The moratorium came a year after the Cabot *Heritage Minute* when Canadians were sure that there would be "enough" cod "until the end of time." By the end of the twentieth century, the cod population had not recovered, and numbers continue to decline (Norcliffe 107). While the cod are not yet extinct, they are considered critical and classified as "endangered" by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) (Thorne). Essentially, even though "Foreign fishing had shattered the ecology of the Northwest Atlantic fisheries[, t]he Canadian government proceeded to finish off the survivors" (J. May). The declining numbers, combined with the 30% increase in the fishing quota in 2019 (Munro) means that population recovery looks bleak, and we have Cabot as well as the sanitized narrative of the *Heritage Minutes* to thank for the inevitable extinction of the cod.

The *Heritage Minutes* repeat Canadianism and its myths of abundance and exceptionalism, even today, in a way that populations who are unaware of the continued decline of the cod buy into. Consistent exposure to the ideology that cod will "be enough to feed our kingdom […] until the end of time" precedes, and makes silent, the narrative of resource depletion as well as its effects on Indigenous nations. I call this "historical contagion," which is an epidemic that has infected Canada. While impossible to cure our national narratives of historical contagion, the inclusion of previously silenced voices in the form of counternarratives can slow the rate of transmission. Katarzyna Rukszto argues that the "very visibility [of the *Heritage Minutes*] as mass-circulated products invites other cultural spaces to make them a site for critique, appropriation and/or humour" (75); therefore, from the moment the *Heritage Minutes* emerged, they were destined to invite counternarratives. While Rukszto points out that "The Minutes attempt to reproduce the dominant discourse of Canadian identity, focusing on a multiculturalist idea of national unity out of difference" or a "core myth of Canadian history," the multitude of counternarratives produced "speaks to the incongruity between the dominant language of national identity promoted by the Heritage Project, and the actuality of social relations of difference and

[58] It was not until 1977 that the Canadian Government employed the first regulatory practices on cod by implementing a 200-mile offshore fishing limit (Norcliffe 107). However, the cod population continued to decline drastically.

inequality that historicize and politicize counter-narratives of the nation" (74-75). Nowhere is this more evident than in counternarratives produced by Indigenous peoples.

Laura Beadling believes that when we provide more space to study how "Native filmmakers adapt the Gothic to foreground Native culture, history, and perspectives, a richer view of the interconnections between the Gothic and the history of marginalized peoples comes into view" (112), which is why, when they use the zombie figure, the resulting narratives become a crucial part of the rhizombie. The goals of Indigenous-made Gothic narratives, according to Beadling, are that they draw in non-Indigenous audiences and they "promote knowledge and healing from colonial trauma as well as address[ing] difficult history that has not often been explored in mainstream American film" (112). When Indigenous peoples take up the Gothic, they often represent real-world conflicts more explicitly than other Gothic narratives, and the distancing between the representation and its antecedent that is common in the mode is reduced. For example, Barnaby's *Blood Quantum* undeniably has Gothic elements, but it also has extensive similarities with real conflicts, such as Cabot and the declining cod, that have and are plaguing Indigenous peoples and nations. As previously mentioned, Burnham notes how Indigenous Gothic is not merely a "contribution to" the Gothic, but also represents "interventions in" it (228). For instance, in an interview with *Canadian Dimension*, Barnaby shares, "as an Indigenous filmmaker, I'm trying to present a new perspective that allows us to ask new questions in the zombie genre" (qtd. in Carleton). The reason for this is that "So many [settler] representations of Indigenous peoples dehumanize us as a way of assuaging colonial guilt. I wanted to challenge all that" (qtd. in Carleton). As such, *Blood Quantum* and other Indigenous-made zombie narratives challenge stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples as a way to "haunt back" against historical contagion.

Barnaby believes, "the ultimate message of the film [*Blood Quantum*] is that if we're going to survive—from the sickness of colonialism and capitalism—we're going to need to work together" (Carleton). Barnaby's use of the term "sickness" reveals that the elements of contagion in *Blood Quantum*, and Indigenous-made zombie narratives more broadly, go beyond the plague spread by the zombies; instead, contagion encapsulates the long history of colonialism to which Indigenous-made narratives, drawing on conventions of horror and the Gothic, are responding. Barnaby shows all this by referencing the "iconic" moments that

have constructed and maintained the national narrative of Canada—by highlighting how ideological apparatuses, such as the *Canadian Heritage Minutes*, misrepresent Indigenous peoples during these "iconic" moments and thus function as sites of historical contagion. Indigenous narratives that draw on Gothic conventions are therefore not just embodiments of the fears and traumas of Indigenous peoples in the manner of traditional Gothic, but they also represent how the historicizing of Indigenous peoples has functioned as a kind of contagion. Narratives like *Blood Quantum* have the potential to disrupt these contagious misrepresentations. To do so, Barnaby proposes "work[ing] together" (qtd. in Carleton). While this might sound like a utopic program, what Barnaby is suggesting is a kind of rhizombic and multispecies approach—what Donna Haraway would call "thinking with" and "making kin" in the Chthulucene: "living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (*Staying* 2)—or what the Mi'kmaq call *Netukulimk*.

1497: Something Fishy is Going on

The burgeoning of Indigenous Gothic in the twenty-first century represents Bruno Starrs' "literary retaliation" whereby previously silenced Indigenous peoples have "wrestl[ed] the keyboard away" and are finally "writing back," or in this case, haunting back. According to Goddu, who coined the term, "haunting back" occurs when oppressed groups who have been haunted by a nation's narratives co-opt those narratives and reposition themselves and their oppressors in a different haunting/haunted dynamic (*Gothic America* 132). Despite Goddu's original use of "haunting back" being in reference to American slavery narratives, such as the novels of Toni Morrison, it can also be applied to narratives by other oppressed groups, including Indigenous peoples. The term "haunting" does not necessarily connote the presence of ghosts or spectres. Etymologically, "haunting" has its origins in the thirteenth century, referring to the action of practicing something habitually or frequenting a place (OED). Avery Gordon uses "the term haunting to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view," essentially, when what has been silenced or repressed returns *a la Freud*. It is we, the Indigenous, who have been silenced and repressed, primed to return and

haunt, and for Belcourt, "Haunting speaks us into existence" (30). Therefore, while ghosts and spectres become the usual embodiments of haunting, they are just the typical vessels through which oppression manifests; they are not the sole purveyors of it.

Many Indigenous horror narratives make persistent references to conflicts between Indigenous nations and the Canadian government because these narratives expose how the repetition of national narratives becomes historical contagion, a kind of haunting for oppressed groups who have been excluded from, misrepresented within, or damaged by them. Newer nations, such as Canada and America, are invariably vulnerable spaces for haunting back to emerge because their search for identity "signals a fear of contagion" (Goddu "Introduction" 267), and while haunting back can take many forms, unsurprisingly and keeping in line with Goddu's argument, Indigenous-made narratives exploit the fear of contagion, manifesting not necessarily as ghosts or spectres but as contagion: zombies. Therefore, Barnaby's 2019 Indigenous made, "anti-colonial" (Carleton) zombie film, *Blood Quantum*, is a prime example of haunting back.

Blood Quantum is set in 1981 and follows a group of Indigenous survivors of a zombie viral plague. Specifically, the film follows a Mi'kmaw family, who establish a safe zone on the fictional Red Crow Indian Reservation where they protect both Indigenous and settler survivors, although the inclusion of the latter is a point of contention for some characters. Like most zombie narratives, the pathogen eventually makes its way into the safe zone, leading to the downfall of the Reservation. The film ultimately ends with two Indigenous survivors, Joss and Joseph, and Joseph's white, pregnant girlfriend, Charlie, floating away on a fishing boat. Despite her infection, Charlie gives birth to a human baby before she succumbs to the zombie virus—thereby revealing how the baby passes blood quantum, because in this film, Indigenous survivors, and only Indigenous survivors, are immune to the zombie virus.

Blood Quantum opens with a scene that haunts back against Cabot's foundation myth, emphasizing conflicts regarding fishing rights and access to consumption. In this scene, Gisigu—the Elder figure—returns from a fishing trip and finds himself surrounded by zombie fish—essentially, "stayed" in a very Cabot-like manner. While standing onshore and gutting his catch of the day, a gutted fish begins to move. Gisigu looks troubled as the camera zooms out, ending with an extreme long shot of him standing alone, framed on the

left by concrete ruins and on the right by a small wooden fishing cabin (see fig. 20). The zooming out from Gisigu suggests that whatever has infected the fish is not relegated to this single time and space; while it may have started with the fish (like Cabot), it is a much larger issue. Extreme long shots show "the relative insignificance of the character struggling against their environment" (Heiderrich 7); thus, Gisigu is initially posited as relatively insignificant within this newly zombie-infested landscape. However, throughout the film, Gisigu proves to be a strong character whose actions ensure the continuation of Mi'kmaq culture.


Figure 20: A screengrab of Gisigu in the opening scene of *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

Gisigu's scene embodies two of the main qualities of haunting back. The first quality is when the narrative "expose[s] the cultural contradictions of national myth" (Goddu *Gothic America* 10). The second quality is when the Indigenous characters are centered or come out as the victors in the end. For the first quality, the zombie fish expose the cultural contradictions of Cabot's foundation myth—and its myths of abundance and exceptionalism. As we determined, the myth of abundance mistakes a lack of resource scarcity as resource security, so the fish in *Blood Quantum*, unlike the cod in 1497, represent a source of food that might be abundant (lack of resource scarcity) but is also inedible (rejecting resource security). As such, *Blood Quantum* haunts back during the opening scene by exposing the contradictions in the myth of abundance because the fish resist the two primary aspects of settler resource positioning: consumption and eventual extinction. The reduction of fish in 1497 to a single role—food—for settlers is overhauled in *Blood Quantum* as the zombie fish become the consumers when they are infected with the zombie pathogen. The fish thus refuse to become "disposable models to humans," as Haraway would call it ("When Species Meet" 54). As a result, the humans (Indigenous and settler alike) in *Blood Quantum* must rethink their relationship to the fish, and by extension, the other species in the film, in a kind of way that destabilizes signifiers and species hierarchies. When a food source, such as cod, are

"mined more like a non-renewable resource" as previously discussed, then "the resource cycle [is] being taken to its limits" in what Norcliffe identifies as the point of extinction (101). *Blood Quantum* reveals the potential to shift resource positioning in a way that disrupts the settler consumption and extinction imperatives. For example, not only do the fish shift away from being a signifier of food, but they also become monsters and purveyors of contagion, embodying a similar signification to the settler zombies in the film. The suggestion, then, is that the settlers are not superior species-wise to the fish; the two have much more in common, occupying a similar position within the food chain. The myth of abundance solidifies the eventual extinction of the resource; however, the fish in *Blood Quantum* haunt back by resisting extinction. In contrast to the cod, which are near extinction, it is impossible to elicit the extinction of the zombie fish. The fish can no longer be consumed, but if they were, they would not nourish, they would destroy their consumers with the zombie pathogen. Therefore, consumption in the film is an inherent contradiction—the fish are a food source that is inedible, and it is this inherent destruction from something meant to nourish that suggests a haunting back.

During the zombie outbreak in *Blood Quantum*, it is revealed that Indigenous peoples are immune. Whether that immunity arises in tandem with the zombie infestation or has always been a part of Indigenous being is unclear. One theory presented in the film is that the land brought forth this virus to eliminate the invasive species—which we could otherwise call settler species—and establish a kind of land back, suggesting the virus and thus immunity come from the land itself. Scientifically, this makes sense; for example, when humans travel into areas that they have not previously explored, they make contact with new microbes (Wald xiv). Therefore, if the zombie virus in *Blood Quantum* is native (so to speak) to Turtle Island, then contact with the virus becomes deadly for those who are newer to the area.[59] Regardless, the zombie infestation allows for a restructuring of dominant groups and reveals "extinction selectivity," which is when some species are more likely to go extinct due to aspects of their ecology (Cole and Hopkins 1). Selina R. Cole and Melanie J. Hopkins argue that "mass extinctions change the trajectory of evolution by restructuring ecosystems, altering the dominant types of functional ecological groups, and affecting patterns of

[59] There is no indication in the film that the zombie virus has been around since the initial colonisation of Turtle Island; however, origins (both time and place) are often left unexplained in zombie narratives.

morphological evolution" (1). Essentially, in a haunting back against exceptionalism, Indigenous peoples in Barnaby's world are naturally selected to survive the zombie epidemic.

But this reversal of exception also leads me to the second quality of haunting back where Indigenous peoples are centered. In *Blood Quantum*, Indigenous actors comprise the majority of the characters: Indigenous characters occupy the positions of both protagonist and antagonist, and in the end, Indigenous characters are the only remaining survivors as a result of extinction selectivity. Indigenous bodies, through their immunity and on-screen dominance, are restructured within a new anti-colonial ecosystem. While narratives of first contact usually contradict themselves by representing the Indigenous populations of Turtle Island as both absent (*Terra Nullius*) and "savage," the extreme long shot in Gisigu's scene suggests that he—the Indigenous man—is both present and the last signifier of civilisation. Indigenous peoples are therefore the antithesis of savagery, and the film haunts back against this outdated stereotype. Even though inserting more Indigenous characters in the narrative is one of the central tenets of haunting back, as Kester Dyer argues, it does not necessarily constitute haunting back on its own, so it needs to work in tandem with exposing contradictions within the national narratives. Haunting back and Indigenous-made zombie narratives are not merely rewriting history from the point of view of previously silenced Indigenous peoples, nor are they simply remaking the zombie narrative with Indigenous characters. The inclusion of non-Indigenous characters is crucial for haunting back because, in these narratives, "White survivors have to confront one of the deepest fears of a racist society: What would happen if the shoe were on the other foot and the racial power balance upended?" (S. Gordon). For this to occur, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters are required. In contrast, Indigenous characters seem to be largely absent in the referent narratives, such as the Cabot *Heritage Minute* and many others. The inclusion of both groups within narratives that haunt back reveals how Indigenous zombie narratives are not making claims to the truth of historical conflicts but rather function as a synchronous history or what Raul Cârstocea has called "synchronous nationalisms"[60]—those "numerous competing nationalisms […] varying across both the spatial and temporal axes" (482). Cârstocea argues that when two histories or nationalisms are restructured, "binary understandings of

[60] Cârstocea's synchronous nationalisms is initially in reference to South-Eastern Europe.

nationalism [as well as] the essentialist reification that can contemplate a single ideal type as a dominant or even exclusive manifestation of nationalism in a given territory" are also challenged (481-2)—in a way, they move from binary, settler-informed understandings to rhizomatic, Indigenous-informed ones.

Even though Rukszto argues that "the imitation of a text necessarily legitimates the original text" (76), meaning to rewrite history risks reinforcing the ideology of the original narrative, which would be counter to the purpose of haunting back, *Blood Quantum*'s dismantling of settler binarism by representing synchronous nationalisms resists reification. If we borrow Rukszto's ideas, then, haunting back is "both transgressive and conservative" (76). The question remains, though, what is the purpose of haunting back if it does not claim truth and it does not rewrite history? To answer this, I turn to Kiowa Gordon, who plays Indigenous survivor Lysol in *Blood Quantum*. Gordon points out how "ever since natives were in cinema, it's always been somebody else's voice, and somebody else's face, and somebody else's makeup on them. Now we can actually take that back" (qtd. in Yamato). Indigenous-made narratives are "ushering in a new age for the next generation to say, 'OK, let's go out there and take our lives back'" (K. Gordon; qtd. in Yamato). In Gisigu's scene, for example, the Indigenous survivor may seem insignificant standing alone upon a land of contagion, but this is just the beginning of a narrative where he and his community can finally take back the land.

No Rest(igouche) for the Salmon

While I argue that the opening scene with Gisigu and the zombie fish is a haunting back against the 1497 "discovery" of Newfoundland, it is also a haunting back against the 1981 raids at Restigouche, which Barnaby witnessed firsthand (Bramesco). As such, the film creates connections between the internodes of two seemingly disparate histories. In June of 1981, the Quebec Provincial Police (QPP) raided the Listuguj community (which is part of the Restigouche region) to restrict the Atlantic salmon fishing rights of the Mi'kmaq—what Gabrielle Béland calls part of the ongoing "salmon wars." After initially asking the Mi'kmaq to withdraw their fishing nets and the Mi'kmaq refusing, asserting their Treaty Rights ("40 years after"), the QPP confiscated the fishing nets, violently beat several protestors, and

arrested nine members of the Listuguj community (Béland). A few days later the police returned to confiscate any additional nets, firing rubber bullets and tear gas ("40 years after"). The initial reason given by the Quebec government for the raids was sustainability ("40 years after"), but the motivations are much more complex than this. For instance, Alanis Obomsawin explains that the salmon fishing yields of the Atlantic provinces, Greenland, and Iceland in 1981 were 3,285 tonnes (*Incident at Restigouche*). While Obomsawin does not provide the exact numbers of salmon fished by the Quebec fisheries, she does explain that the New Brunswick fisheries only took in 109 tonnes (*Incident*), and the further inland, the numbers of salmon yields dropped. Because Quebec was so far inland, it experienced a significant decline in Atlantic salmon (Béland). To recover some of these losses, the government targeted the fishing rights of the Mi'kmaq (Béland). However, the Mi'kmaq of Restigouche only yielded six tonnes of salmon in 1981, considerably less than any other region (Obomsawin, *Incident*). As such, limiting the salmon fishing rights of the Mi'kmaq would have very little impact on Quebec's yields. A few weeks after the raids, Lucien Lessard, who was Minister of Recreation, Hunting and Fishing with the Parti Québécois at the time, claimed that "somewhat peace" [*sic*] (qtd. in Béland) had been reached. In March 1982, a deal was signed that limited the quotas of Mi'kmaq fishermen; however, the deal did not take hold, so the following year the Mi'kmaw Band Council developed their own Fishing Law ("40 years after").

Mike Isaac, who witnessed the Restigouche raids firsthand, highlights how the events were "traumatic," but they also created "opportunities to overcome" that trauma (qtd. in "40 years after"). This is exactly how Barnaby seems to have approached the conflict. In an interview with *The Globe and Mail*, Barnaby reveals that one of his earliest memories of contact with people from off Listuguj was a rifle butt to the head during the 1981 raids (Black). Therefore, Restigouche marks Barnaby's "first contact"—literally—and was clearly a colonial encounter that inspired much of his film. Not only is the film set in the same year as Restigouche, but Barnaby had his cast and crew watch Obomsawin's 1984 documentary, *Incident at Restigouche*, in preparation for filming, so they would have a better idea of the conflicts informing *Blood Quantum* (Yamato). Barnaby admits that Obomsawin "was the only Native film-maker that I had to look up to and build my ideas around"; therefore, inspired by her work, Barnaby went into filmmaking, believing that it was both a "form of

social protest" (Stroumboulopoulos) and an effective means through which to educate Indigenous peoples and settlers alike about Indigenous culture and history (Bramesco). Barnaby admits that he also filmed scenes in the same locations that the raids took place and that appear in Obomsawin's coverage of the incidents (Carleton). These scenes and their connections to Restigouche are not explicitly explained to the audience—one must be familiar with the events themselves and/or the media coverage of said events to understand the references—and the way Barnaby presents them draws on a long history of horror's ability to unsettle.

Unsettling begins in the opening scene of the film. The actual fish used in the opening scene of *Blood Quantum* are salmon, and because they are inedible, Gisigu is barred from being able to engage with his Treaty Rights in a reference to Restigouche. By turning the salmon into zombies, not only is Barnaby drawing attention to how the salmon were historically taken from the Mi'kmaq during the Restigouche raids, but he also makes them inedible for non-Indigenous peoples in a kind of haunting back against the raids and restrictions. As a result, neither the non-Indigenous nor the Mi'kmaq survivors can consume or elicit the decline or extinction of the zombie salmon in a haunting back against the overfishing of the species. Moreover, because the cause of the zombie epidemic is never revealed, the zombie salmon highlight how the Mi'kmaq are not responsible for the loss of salmon as a food source as they are already infected when Gisigu pulls them from the water. Finally, the salmon, like the settlers, can become infected, so the suggestion here is that the two can infect one another. The settlers have a much larger ecological impact on the salmon than the Mi'kmaq survivors in the film in a haunting back against Quebec's sustainability motive.

Unfortunately, Quebec's discourse is part of a long history that demonstrates "the political power of conservation as one of the only reasons the federal government can justify infringing upon the rights of [I]ndigenous peoples" (King). While post-dating Restigouche, the Supreme Court's decision in *Sparrow* legitimized conservation as a legal and political tool to be wielded against Indigenous Treaty Rights (King). In 1984, Ronald Sparrow was charged for fishing with a net that did not meet the terms of his fishing license (King). Sparrow appealed the charge, asserting his Treaty Rights, and in 1990, the Supreme Court recognized his rights but stated that these rights do "not promise immunity from government

regulation" (King). While the use of the term "immunity" in the case of *Sparrow* is part of legal discourse, the parallels between legal immunity and viral immunity in *Blood Quantum* cannot be overlooked. Whereas the court states that Treaty Rights do not promise Sparrow immunity, the courts and other systems of dominance hold no power over Indigenous immunity in Barnaby's film. In this manner, the film questions and even dismantles the power of these systems in denoting Indigenous identity—something the title, blood quantum, also accomplishes. Specifically, *Sparrow* resulted in the formal legal declaration that conservation is the only thing more important than Treaty Rights: "The justification of conservation and resource management, is uncontroversial" (qtd. in King). Therefore, *Sparrow* represents the acknowledgment of Treaty Rights, but it also highlights the importance of conservation, and it ties the two together in an intricate narrative where one can be used against the other, which also suggests they cannot co-exist. As a result, since *Sparrow,* the government has been wielding the narrative of conservation against Indigenous nations, but, just as I argue that contagion and climate change are not mutually exclusive, but are both entangled in the rhizombie, so too do I argue that Indigenous Treaty Rights and conservation function together. Chief Alphonse Metallic identified this correlation during the Restigouche raids, claiming that Lessard wants to "save the salmon and kill the Indians—a salmon is worth more than an Indian anyway" (qtd. in Ambroziak).

The fact that the "salmon wars" even exist suggests that there is not enough salmon to go around. Unlike the cod, the salmon have therefore been constructed as a limited resource that calls for conservation, and the death of the "Indian" is constructed as a requirement to "save the salmon." Ironically, according to the 2019 Assessment Report created by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), "lands managed by Indigenous Peoples tend to be healthier and more vibrant than other areas. This is in stark contrast [to] the report's other findings: over 1 million species of plants and animals are threatened with extinction. Yet Indigenous territories sustain animals, plants, clean air and fresh waters that are in dangerous decline elsewhere" ("Healthy Lands"). The reasons noted for this contrast include "respectful management," maintaining strong relationships between people and the land, and using traditional knowledge ("Healthy Lands"), essentially the multitude of equitable entanglements that also guide the survival of the Inuit characters in *Slash/Back.*

All of these practices are crucial elements of *Netukulimk*: the Mi'kmaw concept of sustainability. According to Mi'kmaw elder and poet, Rita Joe, *Netukulimk* is "one of the most important lessons a Micmac child must learn: to treat with respect the Animal Persons that give themselves to him for food. He must not kill more than he needs" (qtd. in Joe and Choyce 34). Joe is not naming this concept as *Netukulimk* here but since she is Mi'kmaw, her practice and principles are in line with the concept, which is born from her, and my, nation. *Netukulimk* states that we live in an interconnected system with no single part of the system being greater than the others; therefore, maintaining balance becomes the focus of the relationship between Indigenous peoples, other species, and the land, similar in ways to the rhizome and Haraway's "thinking-with." *Netukulimk* dictates that we must only consume enough and reduce wasting resources. Unlike the Cabot character's use of "enough" as something that the cod owe humans, *Netukulimk*'s use of "enough" places the onus on the human. For example, Margaret Robinson points out that "Given the changes that have taken place in our traditional territories, it is animals that are now at risk for not having enough—enough space to live, enough food to eat, enough uncontaminated water to drink" (681). As such, *Netukulimk* is not merely about enough for humans, but about humans ensuring animals also have enough (Robinson 681). Ultimately, while both the Canadian and Quebec governments have represented Indigenous nations as being in opposition to sustainability, recent studies on climate change as well as traditional Indigenous knowledges, such as *Netukulimk*, suggest otherwise. Thus, by turning the salmon into zombies, *Blood Quantum* haunts back against the mythical binary of Treaty Rights versus conservation. As previously elucidated, zombiism ensures that the fish in *Blood Quantum* cannot go extinct because they no longer function as a food resource, and in fact, zombies as a signifier of contagion haunt back by repositioning the salmon in a narrative of increased propagation—zombies, after all, are highly infectious and reproductive agents.

After Gisigu's contact with the zombie fish, there is a series of Dutch angles that are employed to unsettle the history of Restigouche. A Dutch angle occurs "when horizontal and vertical lines go askew" (Bowen & Thompson). Essentially, the camera is tilted, throwing those lines off. The result is that "it causes a sense of uneasiness… [and is often used to convey] when a character is sick or drugged or a situation is 'not quite right'…the imbalance will make the viewer feel how unstable the character or environment really is" (Bowen and

Thompson 119). As such, Dutch angles are common in horror films. The Dutch angles in *Blood Quantum* include various points of view of a city, the water, a bridge that looks similar to the Mercier bridge (see fig. 21), and a cemetery; the first two perspectives are representative of Restigouche while the latter two are representative of the 1990 Oka Crisis. These Dutch angles are used for the scenes that happen to be eerily similar to the media images of both Oka and Restigouche, but as askew, unbalanced versions of these images. The suggestion here is that something is "not quite right" with those initial images and the way they construct Canadian history and its national narratives. Barnaby is signalling that we need to decenter Canadian history—literally turning it over and looking at it from different perspectives.


Figure 21: A screengrab of the Dutch angle of the bridge in *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

In addition to Dutch angles, Barnaby also employs animation, though briefly, to haunt back against Restigouche. In *Blood Quantum*, there are three very short, seemingly out of place, animated scenes within the film. In a live action film dealing with complex and traumatic topics of Indigenous colonization and race relations, the animated scenes feel abrupt and out of place. They are so short that if one doesn't pay close attention, one might miss them entirely. The third animated scene, for example, is only 23 seconds in length. It is no surprise then, that their inclusion within the film stands out. What are these scenes doing? Why are they there? The third of these animated scenes occurs at the end of the film when Elder Gisigu makes his "last" stand. In the live action scene right before this one, it appears as if Gisigu perishes as he goes down fighting a

Figure 22: A screengrab of Gisigu's last stand from *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

horde of zombies at the edge of Red Crow. However, when the scene changes from live action to animation, Gisigu emerges from beneath the mass of zombie bodies. He holds up the head of one zombie and, in the Mi'kmaw language, he declares, "none of you are getting past this line" (see fig. 22; *Blood Quantum*). Gisigu's proclamation reflects the words of a Mi'kmaw Elder from *Incident at Restigouche*, who states in Mi'kmaw, "I take my axe, I draw a line for them not to come any further." Because both of these statements are in Mi'kmaw, they are not meant for the settlers, which means the documentary as well as *Blood Quantum* are hailing the Indigenous viewer and haunting back against the dearth of Indigenous representation in the ideological apparatuses, such as the *Heritage Minutes*, that construct historical contagion.

The tension between the live action and animated parts of Gisigu's "last stand" forces us to question his fate—does he survive, or has he perished? Our privileging of live action over animation throughout the film might entice us to give in to the idea that Gisigu has fallen. However, I argue that both are true—to disrupt the binary of life and death, the seemingly random animated scenes in the film are story,[61] and while Gisigu may indeed perish beneath the zombies in live action, he lives on in the animated scene as story. Gisigu's fate in *Blood Quantum* is part of the film's resistance to the binary because it "imagine[s] other space-times" as Belcourt calls it (28) as well as life and death simultaneously, similar to the manner in which a haunting occurs. Belcourt believes that part of the process of decolonization comes from theorizing temporality through "Indian time" or "the regularity with which Indigenous peoples arrive late or are behind schedule" (28). Belcourt does not propose this in the literal sense of being late to work, for instance, but in bringing the past into the present as well as future imaginings (28). Specifically, Belcourt argues that Indian time "nullifies the normative temporality of settler colonialism in which death is the *telos* of the human and being-in-death is an ontological fallacy" (28). While Belcourt is using the figure of the poltergeist to remodel understandings of queer Indigeneities, his focus on

[61] Louise Gwenneth Phillips and Tracey Bunda argue that "From the Aboriginal point of view, story, in all its Aboriginal-language terms, has always been. [However f]rom the white perspective, the word story emerged in English in the 1200s, derived from the Latin word historia, referring to an account of what had happened" (5). Phillips and Bunda go on to note that it was not until the 1500s that history and story separated where history became a signifier of truth, and story, instead, became a signifier of untruth or fiction (5). This distinction is therefore a settler one because Indigenous story does not necessarily distinguish between truth and fiction or between history and narrative. Therefore, I advocate for the term "story" in this reading of the animated scenes—invoking a discourse that seeks to include all voices—a quality that also reflects Netukulimk.

figures of haunting to resist the *telos* of death is applicable to Gisigu and *Blood Quantum* more broadly. Gisigu's animated scene resists death and repositions his character in a synchronous lifeline. Moreover, the figure of the zombie is literally an embodiment of death in life, or the undead. Belcourt suggests that to decolonize is to "imagine other time-spaces" and "we must become feral" in order to fully accomplish such an imagining (28). Ferality to Belcourt comes in the form of the poltergeist, but for Barnaby and *Blood Quantum*, it is the zombie, and what Belcourt is imagining is what the rhizombie seeks to achieve.

For Gerald Vizenor, story functions as "a native sense of survivance" (*Native Liberty* 58), which is also an other/Other time-space. Vizenor explains that "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories […] Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (*Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*). However, these renunciations are not imaginings of fantasy worlds beyond their respective spaces of contagion; they operate within and as a part of them. Therefore, survivance is not merely "survival" but through the suffix "-ance," it becomes "the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb *survive*, 'to remain alive or in existence,' to out-live, [to] persevere" (Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 100). Vizenor cites Peggy Kamuf, who argues that the suffix "-ance" "calls up a middle voice between the active and passive voices. In this manner it can point to an operation that is not that of a subject or an object" (qtd. in Vizenor, *Native Liberty* 103). Thus, it might be easy to relegate the live action portion of Gisigu's last stand to "tragedy," to "victimry," to history, and to suggest the animated portion is a hopeful fantasy of survival, of perseverance, of fiction, but the animated portion embodies the active sense of presence and becomes a survivance story of the live action portion; Gisigu remains alive and forever defending the edge of the Red Crow Indian Reservation in an anti-colonial time-space.

Some of Vizenor's readers have suggested that survivance is a portmanteau of survival and resistance, and, while Vizenor has never confirmed this theory, he does admit that "a native sense of survivance" blends "strategic resistance" with "the aesthetics of literary irony," pointing out that "Natives created many spirited narratives in the very ruins of racism" (*Native Liberty* 58). Vizenor asserts that the story endures beyond the "life-span of the maker" in what George Steiner calls an "existential presence" (*Native Liberty* 102), so even though Gisigu seems to go down fighting amidst the ruins of the Reservation—a

signifier of racism—he also always already emerges as an existential presence protecting his family in story, a resistance predicated on perishing amidst the ruins of racism.

Vizenor also argues that "communal responsibility, greater than the individual […], animates the practice and consciousness of survivance, a sense of presence, a responsible presence of natural reason, and resistance to absence and victimry" (*Native Liberty* 99). Essentially, there is a responsibility and reciprocity—"communal responsibility"—in the way animation as story functions, which is indicative of *Netukulimk*, but also, because Elders are responsible for story in many Indigenous nations, it is Gisigu's story that determines the future of his community. For example, *Blood Quantum* ends with Gisigu forever holding the edge of the Reservation, refusing to let the settler zombies pass, as his family floats away in a fishing boat (see fig. 23). The future of Gisigu's community, unlike the members of Listuguj in 1981, are free to assert their Treaty Rights by exploring the open waters even if they don't catch any zombie salmon—they resist absence and victimry. As Gisigu takes back the land, then, his kin take back the water in a haunting back against the 1981 raids at Restigouche.


Figure 23: A screengrab of a fishing boat from *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

Oka-nada: Our Home and *Native* Land

In an early scene in *Blood Quantum,* Indigenous survivor Lysol is depicted antagonizing a zombie soldier who is strapped to the side of a shipping container at the entrance to Red Crow. Lysol is standing face to face with the zombie, and the scene is filmed in profile, which makes it potentially familiar to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada during the 1990s. It is a reference to Shaney Komulainen's iconic photograph called "Face to Face" from the 1990 Oka Crisis, which was a well-publicized dispute between Indigenous peoples and the Quebec and Canadian governments (see fig. 24). The Oka Crisis lasted 78 days in Kanehsatà:ke and Kahnawà:ke—a Mohawk village and reserve

respectively—located in Quebec (*Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*). The dispute began with government approval for the expansion of a private golf course into the Pines, which is part of the Mohawk nation, including a Mohawk burial ground (*Kanehsatake*). What started as a small protest on a dirt road resulted in the deployment of the QPP and, eventually, the Canadian Armed Forces (*Kanehsatake*). The Mohawk were tear-gassed and boxsmbarded with concussion grenades; a gun battle ensued; the Mercier bridge, a major bridge between Montreal and its south shore suburbs, was blocked; and two people, one Canadian Corporal and one Mohawk Elder, were killed (*Kanehsatake*). Ultimately, the land was never developed (*Kanehsatake*). Instead, the Interim Land Base Governance Act formally claims the land as belonging to the Mohawk, but in reality, it's "no-man's-land—neither native reserve nor municipal park" ("Land at centre of Oka crisis surrendered by Quebec developer, 29 years later"). However, in 2019, the year that *Blood Quantum* came out, developer Gregoire Gollin turned the land over to the Kanehsatà:ke Mohawk Council in what he claims to be the "spirit of reconciliation" ("Land at centre"). In spite of that, some Mohawks in Kanehsatà:ke point out that Gollin has spearheaded other projects over the years that have infringed on Mohawk territory, and they view his "reconciliatory" efforts merely as a bid for a tax break ("Land at centre"). As such, "Face to Face" represents not just the incident at Oka, but the ongoing narrative of Indigenous-Canadian conflicts.

Figure 24: "Face to Face" by Shaney Komulainen; *The Canadian Press*, 1990.

When "Face to Face" was originally published, Komulainen was doing freelance work for *The Canadian Pres*s, which has been operating in Canada since 1917 as "Canada's trusted news source and leader in providing real-time, bilingual multimedia stories" ("Our Story"). *The Canadian Press* operates as a kind of distributor of news to other companies. Because *The Canadian Press* constructs itself as "trusted" and the "leader" of news stories,

oftentimes these stories do not seem to be verified prior to reprinting. A news story covered by *The Canadian Press* appears in dozens of news media outlets across Canada, and sometimes beyond the Canadian borders, usually with the exact same wording and images. So, "Face to Face" was not relegated to a single newspaper at a single moment in time but appeared in newspapers from coast to coast. During its initial printing on September 2, 1990, it appeared in *The Ottawa Citizen,* the *Montreal Gazette*, and the *Edmonton Journal* (Wilkes and Kehl 488). In this way, "Face to Face" became the single, national, visual representation of the entire Oka conflict. Rima Wilkes notes how images like "Face to Face" "become part of our everyday consciousness" because of their iconic status (qtd. in Allen) where "iconic" is defined as "'photographic images produced in print, electronic, or digital media that are widely recognized, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics'" (qtd. in Wilkes and Kehl 482). "Face to Face" meets all such criteria; that is, until Indigenous artists and filmmakers began to adapt it.

As a national and international distributor and ideological vehicle similar to the *Heritage Minutes*, *The Canadian Press* is primed for propelling images into iconic status, but it only plays a partial role in the process. Rima Wilkes and Michael Kehl have shown that an image becomes iconic because "typically it has metonymy, that is, a particular essence that allows it to act as a stand-in for a larger event and primordiality, that is, it reflects culturally resonant themes" (484). "Face to Face" represents how Canadianism and Canadian identity are predicated upon conflicts with Indigenous nations: "Those images that become iconic nationalist representations also tend to both capture and reflect fundamental tensions within societies, particularly around citizenship and belonging" (Wilkes and Kehl 485). Conflict is therefore crucial for maintaining Canadianism, and this is why "Face to Face" continues to appear frequently when the media takes up other Indigenous-centered conflicts, such as the 1999-2002 Burnt Church Crisis in Nova Scotia (Wilkes and Kehl 494). The iconic image therefore infects our perspectives not only of Oka but of Indigenous nations more broadly and whether they are a part of Canada or a required Other for "Canada" to exist.

"Face to Face," and what it signifies, spread like historical contagion across the nation, infecting Canada. The caption for Komulainen's "Face to Face" reads, "Canadian soldier Patrick Cloutier and Brad Laro[c]que alias 'Freddy Krueger' come face to face in a

tense standoff at Kanehsatake in Oka." Larocque is an Anishinaabe warrior, so there is an irony rooted in the fact that the single visual representation of Oka doesn't even contain a member of the Mohawk nation, exposing the media's hand in constructing pan-Indianist narratives that flatten the diversity of Indigenous peoples. The moniker, Freddy Krueger, refers to the knife-fingered serial killer from the very Gothic *Nightmare on Elm Street* films; he kills his victims in their dreams, which effectively also kills them in the waking world. Therefore, Lorocque is posited exclusively as a monster within the caption to the photograph, whereas Cloutier is marked with his Canadian identity and his contributions as a soldier functioning within the Canadian system, suggesting that the monster (the Indigenous Other) is not Canadian but is rather the antithesis of Canadian identity—one that threatens Canadianism. While "Freddy Krueger" is one of many aliases voluntarily adopted by the Indigenous warriors to protect their identities, the caption for Komulainen's image also functions as a kind of interpellation creating a human/monster dialectic whereby we view the Canadian soldier as human and the Anishinaabe warrior as monster. However, the use of "Freddy Krueger" also carries with it many other significations that make him a powerful figure for haunting back. Krueger's monstrosity primarily only holds up in the dream world, and he requires the existence of dreams and dreamers. His real power therefore lies in destroying dreams as he infects them and turns them into nightmares, so his victims often avoid sleeping. Because he forces his potential victims to stop dreaming altogether, he signifies a threat to the American Dream, disrupting and warning against the pursuit of the it—not unlike Larocque's disruption of and warning against the Canadian dream, wrapped up in the symbolic nature of the golf course—a signifier of affluence and capitalistic pursuits. Larocque voluntarily adopts this alias, so he is using Krueger to haunt back against Canadianism at Oka.

In contrast to Larocque's signifier of monstrosity, Cloutier is often described as "stoic" and "heroic" (Wells). *The Globe and Mail* compared him to "the man who stared down a Red Army tank in Beijing's Tiananmen Square" (qtd. in Wilkes and Kehl 491). He was even fast-tracked up the ranks to Master Corporal before being demoted in 1992 due to cocaine use and alcohol-induced violence (Wells). Wilkes and Kehl, quoting Fee, also argue, "*Face to Face* could be understood as colonial imagery, that is, imagery that 'strips away a huge number of complications, so that what remains is a binary, the binary that ties an

identity as a white settler Anglo-Canadian to the existence of an Aboriginal Other, who leans in threateningly from another-uncivilized-time-frame'" (482). Ironically, what is not evident in "Face to Face" is that Cloutier was not Anglo-Canadian, but rather, French-Canadian; Komulainen suspected that Cloutier only spoke French at the time this photograph was taken (Wells). As such, part of his "stoicism" can be read as an inability to understand Larocque, who was speaking English to Cloutier when the photograph was captured (Wells). While Wilkes' and Kehl's argument suggests that to identify as Canadian (Anglo or not), one must set oneself in contrast to and even be in conflict against the Indigenous, both Larocque and Barnaby draw on the themes of Canadianism and the constructed human/monster binary to haunt back against Oka.

The contradictory nature of national narratives on Turtle Island manifests most prominently within the imaginary of the human/monster binary. *Blood Quantum* haunts back against Oka by flipping and interrogating this binary. In the scene where Lysol is depicted face to face with the zombie soldier (see fig. 25), the positions of the soldier and the Indigenous warrior have been inverted—not only physically seeing as Lysol occupies the physical space inhabited by Cloutier in Komulainen's photograph, but also regarding who is human and who is monster. In the scene from *Blood Quantum*, the soldier is the zombie, so Barnaby takes monstrosity off the body of the Indigenous warrior and places it on the white, Canadian soldier instead.[62] Because the human/monster binary is "integral for the creation and maintenance of dominant/imperial national identities" (Wilkes and Kehl 482), Barnaby's flipping of the human and monster calls into question exactly who or what the dominant national identity is.

Figure 25: A screengrab of Lysol and a zombie soldier from *Blood Quantum*,

[62] While the uniform that the zombie is adorned in differs from the one Cloutier wears in "Face to Face," it is still a 1980s Canadian Armed Forces uniform.

This questioning is also apparent in the fact that in *Blood Quantum*, the Indigenous survivors are immune to the zombie contagion. Haraway argues, "Immune systems are not a minor part of naturecultures; they determine where organisms, including people, can live and with whom" (*The Companion Species Manifesto* 31). Therefore, immunity suggests that Indigenous peoples can live on Turtle Island. Haraway's multispecies work is designed to destabilize binaries, thus the second part of her argument—"with whom"—also suggests that Indigenous peoples can live alongside the zombies because their immunity exists in response to this relationship. As such, Indigenous immunity requires the presence of settler zombies for their immunity to exist and have meaning, and settler zombies require the presence of Indigenous survivors for food. This becomes a somewhat symbiotic interconnected web of species relationships rather than a mere binary.

Therefore, by positioning Cloutier as the monster, the narrative of monstrosity written on the Indigenous body is not simply dismantled or displaced but instead becomes rhizombic. Barnaby seems to respond to and critique the binary narrative once again by positioning his Indigenous version of Larocque (Lysol) as something other than hero and other than monster. In the film, it is Lysol who initiates the downfall of Red Crow by letting in the zombies, so he is clearly not heroic here, but he is also not monstrous. The second animated scene in *Blood Quantum*, which occurs after Lysol is castrated by a zombie, reveals his resistance to the human/monster binary. When the scene changes from live action to animation, everything suddenly turns to flames, and Lysol's face transforms from human to the skeletal mask he is often depicted carrying throughout the film (see fig. 26). Because Lysol is immune to the zombie virus, he cannot literally become a monster. He does not shed his human self in the process of transformation but becomes a kind of human/monster hybrid or a kind of humanoid monstrosity, collapsing distinctions between the self and Other. If animation functions in the manner that I've argued it does in Barnaby's

Figure 26: A screengrab of Lysol's transformation from *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

world, then Lysol as human *and* Lysol as monster are both a part of story. Because this scene, and story, posits Lysol as both human and monster, it maintains Indigenous survivance, blending Vizenor's "strategic resistance" against the binary with "the aesthetics of literary irony" achieved by exposing the contradictions in "Face to Face."

Because one must understand Komulainen's "Face to Face" to be haunted by *Blood Quantum*, the more familiar, or infected, one is with Canada's national narratives, the more likely one is to be haunted. Paulette Regan argues,

> Most Canadians associate violence in this country with the kind of physical confrontation that occurred during the highly publicized conflicts at Oka, Gustafsen Lake, Burnt Church, and Ipperwash Park. We are disturbed by these violent encounters as they call into question a core tenet of Canadian identity – that we are a nation of peacemakers in our relations with Indigenous people. (10)

For instance, Canadian actor Robert Holmes Thompson claims that "Face to Face" is "an emblematic moment for me, of a culture that routinely tries to turn away from escalation and confrontation" (qtd. in Wilkes and Kehl 497). Thompson's knowledge of Oka seems to be static and limited merely to the moment the photograph was taken, since his discourse reflects what the image most commonly signifies; it seems that Thompson is completely unaware of the violence that actually occurred at Oka for two reasons: firstly, he seems unaware that violence lies outside the single iconic photographic representation of the conflict; and, secondly, Thompson can't admit to violence because it contradicts his view of his own Canadian identity as one of peacekeeping. As such, when Indigenous storytellers take up Oka, they have the potential not merely to haunt back against Oka itself, but to challenge and expose the contradictions that make up Canadianism more broadly, to challenge Cabot's claims and the traumas of Restigouche in ways made possible by rhizomatic thinking and rhizombic forms. Barnaby rightly calls Canada a "post-apocalyptic culture" for Indigenous peoples, one that presents a wealth of trauma from which to mine (*Q*). Photographs, such as "Face to Face" are therefore integral pieces of Canadian history, but they are also primed for Indigenous mining, carrying with them both the problematics of damaging Indigenous nations as well as the potential for unsettling Canadianism and its national narratives. Conflicts, such as Oka, are thus not self-contained and do not affect only

one Indigenous community at a specific moment in time. Many Indigenous political and social conflicts are transhistorical and trans-Indigenous, crossing time as well as tribal and community affiliations in the rhizombie. Representations of Oka are intertwined with and therefore become representations of a larger colonial history—from Cabot to Restigouche to Oka and beyond.

Similarly, Gord Hill's graphic novel, *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*, takes up multiple entanglements, including a chapter dedicated to Oka. In 2015, to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the conflict as well as the original publication of the graphic novel, Warrior Productions released a new poster (see fig. 27; Zig Zag). Like Barnaby, G. Hill draws on Gothic conventions to "resist" as his graphic novel claims. In the artwork, G. Hill represents Larocque exactly as he appears in Komulainen's original photograph but posits Cloutier as a tribal skeleton (Zig Zag), thus engaging in a kind of haunting back similar to that in *Blood Quantum*. The fact that both Lysol and G. Hill's commemoration poster employ the skeleton suggests a haunting back against the deeply problematic Indian Burial Ground (IBG) trope as well as the fact that part of the Oka crisis was about a Mohawk burial ground at risk of being destroyed. G. Hill—like Obomsawin,[63] Larocque, and Barnaby—is not of Mohawk descent; he is a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation located on northern Vancouver Island, revealing the trans-Indigenous response to Oka ("Gord Hill"). According to G. Hill, "Oka served to revitalize the warrior spirit of Indigenous peoples and our will to resist" (74) and, he argues, it is "one of the most important examples of current Indigenous resistance" ("The Oka Crisis in 5 Minutes"). Therefore, conflicts such as Oka represent solidarity for Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. Larocque, Barnaby, and G. Hill expose and fight historical contagion by drawing on the Gothic through their use of conventions and characters, such as Freddy Krueger, zombies, and skeletons in their haunting back against Oka.

Figure 27: The commemoration poster for Gord Hill's graphic novel, 2015.

[63] *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* also takes up Oka.

Just One Drop of Blood: Immunity and Blood Quantum

The twist that sets *Blood Quantum* apart from other zombie narratives is that immunity is linked to race. While Rodrick Pocowatchit's 2010 zombie film, *The Dead Can't Dance*, also takes up the concept of Indigenous immunity, it roots it within an American framework. Taking place in modern day Kansas, *The Dead Can't Dance* follows three Comanche survivors trying to navigate a zombie-infested world, and along the way, reconciling their familial problems. It also takes up important issues plaguing Indigenous people more broadly, such as alcoholism, health inequities, and Indian Boarding Schools, primarily as they are intertwined with intergenerational trauma. But, Pocowatchit's film is much more comedic and self-reflective than *Blood Quantum*. Barnaby makes a few clever nods to Pocowatchit's film throughout *Blood Quantum*, and he builds significantly on the social commentary in which *The Dead Can't Dance* engages, but he takes a more serious approach rooted in Canadian history.

The immunity of Indigenous characters in *Blood Quantum* is linked to their biology, as the title suggests. "Blood quantum" refers to the laws within the United States that determine Indigenous identity and/or access to reservations based on the individual's amount of Indigenous blood—if this is even quantifiable. The blood quantum system has been criticized as a mode of Indigenous erasure; Charles Bramesco precisely refers to the practice as "genocidal." C.H. Newell argues, "*Blood Quantum*'s title alone is loaded with Indigenous resistance as Barnaby turns settler colonialism back onto itself with what is at its core a bloody, vicious satire. The infection in this film is not simply a zombie virus, it's whiteness and everything it entails: colonialism [and] patriarchy." As such, immunity in *Blood Quantum* becomes a marker of resistance—of Indigeneity—to whiteness and Canadianism. While it can be argued that Barnaby is supporting blood quantum laws because immunity and thus Indigeneity seem to be linked to blood status in the film, what he is actually doing is calling into question the reliability of blood quantum laws as a form of measuring or categorising Indigeneity. For example, the film ends with an infected Charlie giving birth on a fishing boat. Even though Charlie is infected, the baby turns out to be human; therefore, the suggestion is that the baby is Indigenous *enough* to be immune. However, what really resists

blood quantum is that blood quantum and the Indian Act are presumably no longer officially being upheld by the infrastructure that constructed them—they are, after all, legal designations requiring a legal and governmental institution to enforce them. The zombie narrative is about collapsing structures, such as legal and government systems, that construct and maintain difference, collapsing the national narratives and asserting Indigeneity via immunity to haunt back against Canadian infrastructure.

While Canada does not have blood quantum in the sense that America does, it does have a similar system within the Indian Act that determines Indian Status as well as access to reserves. Because Indigenous characters are considered to be immune in *Blood Quantum*, immunity becomes synonymous with Indigeneity. While other races may also be immune, they seem largely absent from the film, so *Blood Quantum* is primarily about creating a social commentary about immune Indigenous peoples and potentially monstrous settlers. However, this binary reduction is too simplistic; Barnaby provides several signifiers of an in-betweenness that challenges this binary, such as Charlie's unborn mixed-race baby. The seemingly binary relationship represents an inversion to what Eric Savoy calls "'the face of the tenant'—the spectre of Otherness that haunts the house of national narrative" (13-14) because it is settler survivors that must now seek refuge within the Reservation. According to Burnham, this Gothic inversion reveals that "it is the settler colonist whose face has taken up an unwelcome tenancy in the Native American home, and whose threatening presence haunts [the] American Indian narrative" (227). The settler therefore becomes the monster—the threatening presence, the Other—that has taken up residence on Indigenous land again. When settler survivors seek refuge within Red Crow, it becomes "colonial whiplash," where "white people who haven't turned into zombies are at the mercy of the oppressed" (S. Gordon). Thus, Indigenous-centered immunity means that settlers must turn to Indigenous survivors for help, but specifically, the settlers must find safety on the Reservation.

For example, in an early scene from the film, a pregnant Charlie leads three settler survivors to Red Crow. The group consists of a young girl, infected and wrapped in a blanket, her father, and a youth named Lilith who is later revealed to also be infected. The father desperately pleads with Chief Traylor at the entrance to Red Crow: "I heard that you could cure bites here" (*Blood Quantum*), and he gestures toward Traylor's hand where the camera briefly reveals a bite that has long since healed (see fig. 28). The father's misconception about where immunity is rooted is part of *Blood Quantum*'s haunting back against blood quantum and settler misconceptions about where Indigenous identity is rooted. The film seems to suggest that immunity is inherent—linked to blood or DNA—in the manner that government systems have rooted blood quantum laws, but the settlers' inability to comprehend this idea calls into question the validity of blood quantum as well as the systems more broadly that are intertwined with and maintain it. These systems also include the Indian Act, which, in the late 1800s, was responsible for the creation of Residential Schools, government sponsored, church run institutions that forcibly took approximately 150,000 Indigenous children from their homes (The Union of Ontario Indians 3). Residential Schools forbade the use of Indigenous languages (Union 5), which *Blood Quantum* also haunts back against. When the Indigenous survivors discuss the fate of the infected little girl, they speak Mi'kmaw, and the confused father yells, "Speak English!" (*Blood Quantum*) in an echo of how the Residential Schools sought to squash Indigenous languages. However, only Charlie, the white survivor, speaks English in response, revealing that she understands both languages—her baby, after all, will also represent both races. The colonial whiplash that therefore comes with these survivors desperately seeking refuge on the Reservation is a haunting back against the Indian Act and everything it was responsible for, including blood quantum, the loss of language and culture within the Residential Schools, and the history of

Figure 28: A screengrab of the bite on Traylor's hand from *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

relegating Indigenous peoples to reservations.[64] Because reservations significantly altered traditional Indigenous ways, alcoholism and disease became prominent early on (Miquelon and Parrott), so the fact that settler survivors in *Blood Quantum* not only seek the Reservation but beg for access to it suggests that this land is no longer the center of disease, but in fact, represents the absence of disease—at least until the settler survivors turn into zombies.

After the infected young girl is shot during this scene, her distraught father is pushed, stumbling into the safe zone still carrying the blanket that was wrapped around his recently deceased daughter (*Blood Quantum*). Indigenous survivor James turns to him, yelling "are you fucking crazy" as she rips the blanket, saturated in infected blood, from his arms and throws it into a fire (see fig. 29; *Blood Quantum*). Jason Asenap argues, "This time […] the smallpox blankets are infectious to the 'other side'," suggesting that the infected blanket haunts back against the diseases brought over by Europeans. While the film never explicitly references smallpox, the existence of smallpox blankets as a weapon against Indigenous peoples (Mayor 56) as well as the effects of smallpox and other diseases on Indigenous populations cannot be ignored in this scene's emphasis on the diseased blanket; for example, in 1862, smallpox decimated approximately half of the Indigenous peoples of modern-day British Columbia (Elliott). Asenap therefore calls Barnaby's use of the infected blanket "sweet revenge upon those who brought disease to Indigenous lands." By ripping the blanket from the father's hands and throwing it into the fire, James is highlighting how the bodies of settlers are infectious, and when James follows this by stating, "don't forget; ain't nobody immune here but us" (*Blood Quantum*), she reveals how the infected blanket presents a greater risk to settlers than it does to Indigenous peoples. Thus, James in this scene is haunting back against these diseases.

Figure 29: A screengrab of the infected blanket into a fire from *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

[64] While *Blood Quantum* explicitly uses the term "reservation" when describing Red Crow, in actuality, "reservation" was used primarily to describe Indigenous land in the United States. In Canada, the term "Indian Reserve" is used instead. It refers to "tracts of land set aside for First Nations by the Canadian government" and are governed under the Indian Act (Irwin).

The simultaneous potential and danger of Barnaby's zombieverse is that it emphasizes difference at the bodily level. Indigenous immunity suggests that, at the most basic, biological level, Indigenous bodies are different from other humans. In one respect, this difference emphasizes Indigeneity—a resistance to assimilation—since Indigenous survivors cannot become zombies; however, in another, it reinforces the existence of an essentialist, biological, racial difference. However, Kester Dyer argues, "Indigenous characters have developed a physical immunity to the contagion, presumably due to their prior exposure to colonialism and its ongoing iterations." Dyer therefore represents contagion as an allegory for colonialism, setting social allegory against the biological determinism of blood quantum and contagion, but also bringing the past into the present. The rhizombie might suggest a blending of these two approaches by arguing that colonialism as a kind of virus means that the immune systems of Indigenous people have had hundreds of years of constant exposure for immunity to develop, leaving space for Indigenous bodies to biologically resist historical contagion.

In the previous section, I briefly discussed how immunity in *Blood Quantum* functions as a kind of symbiosis between Indigenous peoples and settler zombies. To better understand what this means, I turn to Haraway's concept of sympoiesis, which in its most basic definition means "making-with" (*Staying* 58). Essentially, Haraway argues that "Critters do not precede their relatings"; therefore, "they make each other through semiotic material involution, out of beings of previous such entanglements" (*Staying* 60). They are always already present in the manner that the rhizombie proposes. Building on Haraway, I argue that immunity becomes a "making-with" process. It requires regular, repeated contact with an organism to emerge. If we are to take Dyer's and Haraway's ideas as launching points for thinking about immunity, the suggestion here is that the zombie signifies everything that whiteness (the settler) signifies, such as "patriarchy, and, most of all, the destruction of our natural world" (Newell). If Indigenous bodies are indeed biologically different due to centuries of exposure to colonisation as Dyer argues, then Indigenous bodies resist everything signified by whiteness and are therefore primed to also protect the natural world, but they can only do so, I argue, by "making-with" whiteness in complex entanglements. *Blood Quantum* takes this idea a little further by creating a zoonotic virus that spreads across species and therefore collapses distinctions between certain species, such as

fish, dogs, and humans. Because zombie narratives posit a set number of species as what Haraway would call "holobionts—that is, symphonic or fungal assemblages of living and nonliving entities that are necessary to each other's being" ("It Matters" 567), *Blood Quantum* suggests that fish, dogs, and humans (Indigenous and settler alike) are necessary to each other's "being."

The lack of overt discussions of other species within the narrative does not suggest that they are not also crucial to holobionts' being but rather, fish, dogs, and settlers carry historical contagion and the "safe" or immune species, such as Indigenous humans, moose, and deer, carry immune responses to historical contagion that maintain balance—that embody *Netukulimk.* For example, while the cause of Indigenous immunity is never confirmed, Indigenous survivor Moon presents a theory that makes colonialism synonymous with climate change:

> The Earth is an animal, living and breathing. White men don't understand this. That's why the dead keep coming back to life. Not because of God. Because this planet we're on is so sick of our shit. This old, tired, angry animal turned these stupid fucking white men into something she can use again: fertilizer. Who says we're immune? [switching to Mi'kmaw] Maybe the earth just forgot about us. (*Blood Quantum*)

Moon's theory posits that the Earth itself is a larger animal intertwined with all other animals in complex entanglements, positioning everything as holobionts engaging in sympoiesis, but Moon also posits that the Earth is still earth, requiring fertilizer to keep functioning. The reduction of white men to fertilizer doesn't mean they are not holobionts; they are still needed. In ecological terms, we can therefore consider immunity as a kind of symbiogenesis. According to Haraway, drawing on the work of Lynn Margulis, symbiogenesis is a "mortal life-making process" whereby genomes first engage in symbiosis followed by natural selection with just "enough quasi-individuality to get through the day" (*Staying* 60). Simply put, symbiogenesis is "becoming-with by living together" (Aanen and Eggleton 99), and it suggests that the species involved require one another for stasis where they still remain individual "enough," the kind of balance toted within *Netukulimk* and the root, so to speak, of the rhizombie's existence. However, Moon's theory also shifts white people from being

ultimate consumers to one of the most basic consumables. In this manner, Moon haunts back against species hierarchies by drawing on *Netukulimk* and symbiogenesis.

Immunity therefore becomes the ultimate signifier of resistance. Brenna Duperron and Elizabeth Edwards explain that "Indigeneity is a resistance — in the usual sense of opposition, repudiation, and refusal to comply […but also] resistant to assimilation. Indigeneity is the lived and embodied experience of peoples who have participated in that resistance" (94). In one sense, immunity is resistance in that it becomes synonymous with Indigeneity, but in another sense, immunity means that Indigenous survivors cannot assimilate into the zombie horde. Therefore, the dangerous presence of settlers within Red Crow constantly threatens not to infect in the manner that modern zombies have operated since their inception in George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*, but to literally consume Indigenous peoples into disappearance—as enough to feed the Kingdom until the end of time.

Consumption is a prominent concept throughout *Blood Quantum*, beginning with the two "Ancient Settler Proverbs" that open the film. One of them states, "Take heed to thyself, that thou make no treaty with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest lest it be cause of ruin among you. […] when they whore themselves to their demons and sacrifice to them, you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters for your sons, they will lead your sons to do the same" (*Blood Quantum*). This "Ancient Settler Proverb" comes from Exodus 34: 12-17, which deals with the issue of whether it is still idolatry to eat the meat sacrificed to idols if one does not partake in the sacrifice itself. The eating of sacrifices in this passage becomes intertwined with interracial coupling, and whether the offspring of said coupling should be sacrificed. This is referenced by the title of the film—*Blood Quantum*—and occurs in an early uncanny scene in which a white mother is depicted consuming her biracial baby. This scene is just one reinforcing the constant anxiety throughout *Blood Quantum* regarding whether the offspring of interracial coupling will result in there being *enough* Indigenous blood to ensure immunity: will these babies be consumers like the settler zombies or consumables like the immune Indigenous survivors?

Immunity therefore places Indigenous bodies at risk of erasure via consumption, but it also invests them with the opportunity to resist consuming. I want to clarify that consumption exists in two capacities within the film: the literal consumption of bodies as in

the zombies consuming human flesh, and the metaphorical consumption via sexual contact that manifests most prominently as interracial coupling within the film. Because the Indigenous characters cannot be infected in the manner common to other zombie narratives, the zombies literally consume Indigenous peoples into disappearance in a manner similar to the overconsumption of non-renewable resources, such as the cod. However, the consumption of Indigenous bodies is safe by comparison because Indigenous bodies cannot be contaminated by the zombie virus. We are clean meat. What this suggests is that, unlike the narratives that posit Indigenous bodies as contaminated or monstrous, Indigenous bodies in *Blood Quantum* are a clean resource that, even though they can still be consumed, resists monstrosity. Barnaby's use of immunity therefore resists consumption as much as it succumbs to it. In this manner, Indigenous bodies cannot be assimilated into the zombie horde. In one sense, it means that Indigenous bodies are at risk of going the way of the cod, yet in another sense, if Indigenous survivors are not consumed, their bodies reflect this continued resistance.

For example, an early scene reveals countless zombie bites scarring Traylor's back (see fig. 30). His body, while scarred, also reveals his ability to resist consumption. In contrast, his son, Lysol, cannot resist consumption. During a party on Red Crow, Lysol elicits sex from Lilith, the white survivor who is admitted onto the Reservation near the beginning of the film. Lysol is completely unaware that Lilith is infected. Later, during their sexual encounter, she turns into a zombie and castrates him. Lysol is engaging in an inverted form of bell hooks' concept of eating the Other whereby it is the non-white male who seeks contact with the white female as a rite of passage instead of the white male soliciting sex from the non-white female. hooks argues, "Getting a bit of the Other, in this case engaging in sexual encounters with non-white females, was considered a ritual of transcendence, a movement out into a world of difference that would transform" (368). The inversion of this ritual occurs twice in the film between Lysol

Figure 30: A screengrab of the bites on Traylor's back from *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

and Lilith. Lysol tells the other Indigenous males a story about being drunk and performing oral sex on Lilith, unaware that she was menstruating. Afterwards, Lysol heads to the police station to help a friend who has been arrested, but when he walks through the door, the police see the blood smeared across his face, and, assuming that Lysol has been in a fight, they arrest him (see fig. 31). The collapsing of alcohol-induced violence and oral sex with the white woman, leading to Lysol's arrest, suggests that interracial sexual relations, or the metaphoric consumption, is a transgression. hook's original argument is about the dominant culture's (i.e., white, colonial) consumption of the Other, so, in contrast to hooks' point that dominant consumption of the Other is "an acceptable rite of passage," the inversion in *Blood Quantum* reveals that the acceptable part is only applicable when it is the white male eliciting sex from the non-white female—when the positions of the consumed and consumer are clear.

Figure 31: A screengrab of Lysol covered in blood from *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

When Lilith castrates Lysol, she turns toward the camera to reveal blood smeared across her mouth in an inverse repetition of Lysol's earlier experience (see fig. 32). In this manner, it is the white woman who performs the acceptable rite of passage—she transforms by becoming a zombie. However, she becomes unstoppable in her consumption. Shortly after this scene, Lysol releases her into the sleeping quarters of the safe zone, where she consumes everyone (*Blood Quantum*). The result of her overconsumption transforms all other bodies—the white survivors become zombies, and the Indigenous survivors become food at the moment of contact. hooks points out that eating the Other "establishes a

Figure 32: A screengrab of Lilith after she castrates Lysol in *Blood Quantum*, 2019.

contemporary narrative where the suffering imposed by structures of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on seduction and longing where the desire is not to make the Other over in one's image but to become the Other" (369). hooks argues that this becomes a form of assuaging settler guilt (hooks 369). However, *Blood Quantum* resists this narrative because instead of Lilith getting a cure or gaining some sort of immunity through her consumption of the Other, she instead passes her monstrosity, so to speak, onto Lysol. While Lysol cannot become a monster *per se*, after his encounter with Lilith, he no longer protects his Indigenous community, which may be due, in part, to a loss of masculinity. Unlike Gisigu, he cannot hold the line and protect his community. Instead, he releases a zombified Lilith into the sleeping quarters of Red Crow, leading to the downfall of the Reservation. Thus, Lysol's character transforms through his contact with Lilith. Lysol cannot resist consumption in the metaphorical sense, but he can resist consumption in the literal sense; thus, his Indigeneity is secured, but it is also called into question.

Conclusion: (Indigenous) Enough to Feed the Kingdom…

This chapter set out to address Indigenous contributions to the rhizombie. The Indigenous-made zombie narrative presents a space for previously silenced voices to finally emerge and speak up—to draw on horror and the Gothic to critique national narratives. Zombie narratives are multitudinous in their ability to produce meaning, so I want to raise the question: what are Indigenous-made zombie narratives doing differently from other branches, shoots and roots, and internodes within the rhizombie? Scott Gordon argues that *Blood Quantum* transforms "the close-range, torso-clawing violence of zombie films [into] a vehicle for a larger story about genocide." I have argued that history itself is a kind of contagion; therefore, ideological apparatuses, such as the *Heritage Minutes* and *The Canadian Press*, have a hand in creating epidemics that infect the population with these narratives and how they vanish, misrepresent, and damage Indigenous peoples and nations. We can turn to Indigenous-made narratives in general not necessarily to cure ourselves of these national narratives; instead, because history is a constructed narrative, the addition of Indigenous-made counter-narratives provides a broader and more complete story. Just as immunity itself is not a "cure" and does not eliminate the zombie pathogen, so too are

narratives that haunt back not something that eliminates or replaces national narratives; they are just a parallel and tandem approach to history—a synchronous nationalism.

However, what *Blood Quantum* also reveals is that such conflicts as Cabot's role in colonial settlement as well as Restigouche and Oka are not self-contained. Many Indigenous political and social conflicts are transhistorical and trans-Indigenous, crossing time as well as tribal and community affiliations. Conflicts are intertwined with and therefore become representations of a larger colonial history. Goddu argues, "while the gothic reveals what haunts the nation's narratives, it can also work to coalesce those narratives" ("Introduction" 270). Therefore, reaffirmation is the peril that Gothic-inflected Indigenous-made narratives take on when they haunt back. This risk, though, is not unique to Indigenous counternarratives—any narrative that draws on elements that make up Canadianism and its myths is likely to reaffirm.

A case in point: in 1997, the same year that Ottawa lifted some of its cod fishing regulations, a replica of Cabot's ship—the *Matthew*—set sail to commemorate the 500-year anniversary of the famous voyage (Pringle). The lifting of the regulations as well as the *Matthew* replica suggest that for the *Matthew* to be as authentic as possible, the cod must be represented as if they are readily available. Added to this, though, is the suggestion that the cod are doomed to be re-fished into eradication and the colonial story re-told. Jack May points out that "It's not certain that Canada has learned from its mistakes with the cod. The fishery has simply turned to alternative species further down the food chain and, in at least some instances, may be pushing their populations towards collapse." Similar to the blood quantum laws, moving down the food chain becomes a kind of assimilation by slowly eliminating species, resulting in the destruction of biodiversity, and eventually a reduction in resistance—a reduction in immunity and Indigeneity. In time, there is a point at which moving down the food chain becomes impossible, as we can see with the cod, so Indigenous-made zombie narratives represent the opportunity to haunt back, to flip the food chain and move back up it, targeting the human settlers.

Indigenous-made zombie narratives, such as *Blood Quantum,* draw on the Gothic, adopt a multispecies approach, and engage with *Netukulimk* to haunt back against national narratives that maintain systems of oppression, especially those that affect Indigenous peoples and nations—and that threaten biodiversity. These narratives suggest that when the

end of the food chain is reached, the systems of oppression can be unsettled by the Gothic in a way that shifts hierarchy. However, this is only possible by adopting a multispecies approach that ensures humans function not solely as consumers but also as possible consumables. *Netukulimk* must be taken into consideration to ensure reciprocity and balance are maintained between species within the food chain. In this case, racial oppression, contagion, and climate issues are all firmly interconnected in the Indigenous part of the rhizombie. In this manner, Indigenous-made zombie narratives ensure that there will be enough to feed the kingdom…until the end of time.

CHAPTER 4

Pandemic:

Possibility Space, Lichenthropy, and the Chthulucene

> *"…fruitful, it [Cordyceps] multiplies, it feeds and protects its children,*
> *And it secures its future with violence if it must…it loves."*
> (David, "When We Are in Need")

> *"No, the best organism for human beings to merge with is the lichen itself.*
> *That way, you'd be human, fungus, and algae.*
> *Triple threat. Like three-bean salad."*
> (Sheldon, "The Stag Convergence")

In *The Last of Us*, Neil Druckman's multi-award-winning 2013 zombie video game, the player-character (PC), Joel, encounters his first major "possibility space" in "The Quarantine Zone"—the second chapter and first mission of the game. Making his way through the dark, spore-filled, Gothic hallways of the abandoned Boston underground, he encounters a survivor trapped beneath fallen rubble. The trapped survivor admits that his gas mask is damaged, meaning that he is exposed to the infected air; he will soon succumb to the fungal pathogen and transform into a zombie. He begs Joel to shoot him before he becomes a monster. With only a few bullets in his gun and no melee weapon, the player as Joel must choose to either shoot the trapped survivor or leave the man to suffer. After shooting him, Joel finds two bullets a few steps away, which seem to reinforce the idea that shooting the infected man is the decision the game (or perhaps its designer) wants the player to make. While the player is given choices, such as this one, throughout *The Last of Us*, several factors suggest that the ability to make decisions in the game is an illusion: character development, species interconnectivity, American climate change politics, the ideological formations that inform player approaches, or what I refer to as "player ideology," and the fungi-like nature of the zombie infection contribute to the myth of "possibility space"—the multitude of play possibilities that a player is faced with in a video game.

According to Ian Bogost, who initially put forth the idea, "possibility space" in video games refers to "the myriad configurations the player might construct to see the ways the processes inscribed in the system work. This is really what we do when we *play* video games: we explore the possibility space its rules afford by manipulating the game's controls"

(42-43). Essentially, possibility space encompasses the various ways in which a player explores the video game world. Laquana Cooke, Lisa Dusenberry, and Joy Robinson, citing Katie Salen Tekinbas and Eric Zimmerman, describe possibility space as "all the actions available in a metaphorical or literal [gaming] environment" (327). In the literal sense, then, it can take the form of spatial exploration, such as how far and in what ways a player explores locations within the game. For example, open world video games that do not confine players to predefined areas present more literal possibility space than a closed world—or storyline based—video game. This is because the game is not programmed to limit the player from entering particular areas. Nonetheless, while a closed world, storyline-based video game limits how much of the virtual world can be explored during a given time, it can still present more literal possibility space by providing the player with various decision-making opportunities and/or more possible decisions within those opportunities. For instance, "The Quarantine Zone" scene from the beginning of *The Last of Us* allows players to choose whether or not to shoot the trapped infected survivor. This decision seems to be independent of both the spatial and storyline qualities of the video game. Instead, the possibility space afforded in this moment is small, having only two possible outcomes, but it is also contingent upon the kind of character the player envisions themselves as Joel to be—the possible decision in this moment appeals to the player's capacity for empathy or perhaps the player's opinion on gun violence or even the player's beliefs about assisted suicide, which is where metaphorical possibility space comes in. It is worth noting that *The Last of Us* can be played entirely using stealth, meaning the game can be completed without ever having to fire a gun. My intention here is not to argue that video games are linked to real-world violence—there have been numerous studies that argue both for (C. A. Anderson; Fordyce; Gotterbarn; Waddington) and against (Tavinor) this idea—but instead that there is potential for a player's real-world belief systems and knowledge approaches to affect the decisions they make in the game (not the other way around); therefore, player ideology, while impossible to fully identify or extrapolate from the game play itself, is a metaphorical part of possibility space that intrudes upon literal possibility space and can affect gameplay.

Of all the zombie narratives I discuss, the zombie video game best encapsulates the rhizomatic possibilities of zombies. While Chapter 2 focuses on Black entanglements, and Chapter 3 deals with Indigenous entanglements, Chapter 4 is concerned with interspecies

entanglements and how narratives are interconnected with players and the myriad ways in which games respond to contagion and climate change in what Haraway calls the Chthulucene. In this chapter, I argue that the perception of involvement in decision making processes (a part of possibility space) in ecoGothic zombie video games—with a specific focus on *The Last of Us*—reveals how twenty-first century American video games suggest that its citizens cannot adopt or participate in a narrative of response-ability for involvement in climate change due in part to Anthropic thinking, which I aim to shift into zombific thinking. Moving from my discussion of how Barnaby's film addresses biodiversity in relation to colonial systems of oppression, this chapter applies ideas of interconnectedness, such as Haraway's Chthulucene, to ecoGothic zombie video games, in order to analyze them as forms of environmental storytelling, or terraforming; in doing so, I demonstrate how the pushing of a button on a controller becomes implicated within climate catastrophe.

Earth Altering: Possibility Space and Engendering Response-Ability

In the 2019 PlayStation zombie video game *Days Gone*, player ideology is tested every time the player rescues a survivor. *Days Gone* takes place two years after the zombie pathogen has ravaged Oregon. The player plays as Deacon St. John, a biker outlaw turned drifter after marrying Dr. Sarah Whitaker, a botanist whose research, the game later reveals, is responsible for the zombie pandemic. In this manner, like *The Last of Us*, *Days Gone* roots the zombie pathogen within something environmental and plant based. Using the third-person-over-the-shoulder perspective, the player explores a hybridized storyline/limited open world (see fig. 33), usually on his motorcycle. While the world that appears on the virtual map in *Days Gone* can be explored in whatever manner the player wishes, there are parts that appear cloudy and will only be revealed when the player reaches certain points in the storyline. Throughout the video game, the player


Figure 33: The third-person over-the-should view of Deacon St. John, 2019.

rescues survivors. After doing so, a pop-up along the bottom of the screen allows players to send these survivors to a nearby camp (see fig. 34). The player can choose to send survivors to Hot Springs, Copeland's Camp, or Iron Mike's. A player's decision is partially determined by what each camp represents: Iron Mike's is progressive, based on equality between survivors, and offers medical care, whereas Hot Springs is a labour camp led by a kind of dictator. However, the player's decision is also determined by the reward offered by the camp: Iron Mike's offers 1000 trust points whereas Hot Springs offers 200 credits. This is called a ludological framework in video game design whereby "the sequences are not predetermined but the criteria/rewards for decision making are" (Gotterbarn 9). Credits and trust can only be used at the camp that awards them, and each camp offers weapons and upgrades that cannot be found at other camps, including trophies for earning higher levels of trust. If the player does not develop enough trust with Iron Mike's, they cannot progress to the second part of the storyline. As such, ludological gaming networks are rhizomatic, and the disproportionate rewards offered by each camp and the game's further rewarding of developing trust can test player ideology and character development as Deacon St. John, limiting metaphorical possibility space.

Figure 34: The player as Deacon rescues a survivor in *Days Gone*, 2019.

For instance, even though Copeland's camp is defined by Radio Free Oregon—a survivalist and conspiracy theory broadcast run by Mark Copeland that operates under the tagline, "the truth shall set you free" —the player can still work with the camp and send survivors there. After all, Copeland's Camp offers both trust points and financial benefits, and the fact that each camp contains unique enhancements might entice a player to send along a rescued survivor even though doing so runs counter to the player's ideology or their conceptions of Deacon's character. Whenever the radio broadcast plays, for instance, Deacon makes angry quips in disagreement with Copeland's ideas; thus, the player's development as Deacon suggests they should disagree with Copeland. An unnamed video game design

student from one case study that Cooke et al. explore, argues, "Giving too little agency might strengthen your story, but lessen the impact and influence it has on the user" (334). In the case of *Days Gone*, regardless of whether character development and the game's story engender an anti-survivalist and/or anti-conspiracy theorist stance, the player must still be given the opportunity to support Copeland's Camp. Eugen Pfister suggests that video games "reproduce – consciously or subconsciously – distinct ideas of the world and convey values whenever they construct ideas of good and evil […] In terms of historical discourse analysis, we can therefore speak of dominant ideological statements that are communicated and constructed" (231). However, Pfister elaborates on this idea, pointing out that the narrative aspects of the video game are only one dimension of its ideological statement; because video games are also an "interactive experience" they "potentially allow for the emergence of many – possibly contradictory – ideas within their game rules" (232). This is the risk that *Days Gone* takes when presenting the three options for survivor relocation, and as such, its possibility space oftentimes supports but also conflicts with the ideologies of both the player and Deacon's character.

Possibility space is consequently difficult to measure owing to the variety of literal and metaphorical ways it can manifest within a video game. In some cases, the decision a player makes early in the game will affect what possibilities exist later in the game, so that two players playing the same game, due to making different decisions early on, will inevitably face different options later. As such, these two players engender different possibility spaces—they become different offshoots of the same internode in the rhizombie. Cooke et al. also suggest that the level of player experience becomes a potential factor in affecting possibility space, noting how "understanding the boundaries and resources of the possibility space is difficult, as is understanding how their manipulations within that space result in changes to the surrounding system," leading to more experienced gamers better navigating the myriad possibilities (329). Because player experience and the way in which players interact with the game ultimately affect the possibility space, the "game design*er* does not directly design play. Instead, they design spaces of possible meaning bounded by the designer's situational knowledge that players act within" (Cooke et al. 331), which is largely what I focus on in this chapter. Due to possibility space being ultimately unmeasurable and unique to each gamer and each gaming experience with a video game, my

analysis of these games relies upon the unique gameplay I have witnessed firsthand;[65] therefore, I seek to focus less on player engagement and more on narratology and addressing parallels between possibility space and the ecoGothic aspects of the video game's story.

Michael Hancock calls possibility space "the lie of rational choice" and notes that this myth "serves as a paradoxically unstable but grounded real" (166-167). Hancock's point reveals the horror behind the myth of possibility space in ecoGothic video games, such as *The Last of Us*—that it presents itself as a "grounded real" for the player of the video game. "The Quarantine Zone," for instance, is probably the most important chapter for setting up character development and player ideology, since this is the "tutorial chapter" where the player encounters the "rules" of the game in useful pop-ups, mini diagrams, and found objects. The fact that the first possibility space appears in this chapter reinforces not only the myth of decision making, but the weight of the decisions to be made precisely because they are life and death decisions. Hancock notes that "what video games highlight is that choice—that marker of the Enlightened and rational subject—is itself a simulation" (169). This conclusion can be expanded beyond the space of the video game to the material world: for instance, Timothy Morton uses the example of turning a car key to situate the individual's role as a rational subject in making Earth altering—possibly life and death—decisions.

In their example, Morton highlights how their "key turning is statistically meaningless" (*Dark Ecology* 8). However, Morton goes on to note how with "billions of key turnings […] harm to Earth is precisely what is happening. I am responsible as a member of this species for the Anthropocene" and, as a result, one key turning posits a single human as culpable in the destruction of Earth merely by belonging to the human species (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 8). Therefore, individual choice is itself a myth. Because the Anthropocene positions the human at the center of environmental destruction, belonging to the human species situates the individual subject within this center as well, and even if the individual refrains from turning a key, their species is implicated in the outcome of multiple keys turning. One would literally have to change what species they are to move beyond Anthropos implication in the Anthropocene. The individual therefore has the perceived control of not turning the key, yet

[65] The majority of my analysis stems from watching my partner play these games; however, I have also watched multiple gameplays by a variety of gamers for each game on YouTube. I do not reference individual gameplays throughout this chapter.

not to do so has little effect on key turnings altogether. The problematic that Morton identifies here is the construction of "responsibility"—or what Haraway more precisely calls "response-ability" (*Staying* 98). According to Haraway,

> The decisions and transformations so urgent in our times for learning again, or for the first time, how to become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living and dying well in multispecies symbiosis, sympoiesis, and symanimagensis on a damaged planet, must be made without guarantees or the expectation of harmony with those who are not oneself—and not safely other, either. (*Staying* 98)

What Haraway seems to suggest here is that it is crucial to note the human response-ability to turn (or stop turning) keys to respond to climate change—essentially, to embrace all acts as part of what she calls terraforming. However, response-ability comes with the risk of creating conflict. So, like Morton, is Haraway also then suggesting that choice itself is a simulation?

While Morton suggests the ability to respond is not necessarily possible, Morton's approach is rooted in the Anthropocene, the name given to the "time-space-global thing" first coined in the 1980s by ecologist Eugene Stoermer "to refer to [what he believes is the] growing evidence for the transformative effects of human activities on the earth" (Haraway, *Staying* 44). Haraway, however, suggests an alternate naming and accompanying response-ability structure for our current geological epoch: the Chthulucene. The Chthulucene is determined by "tentacular thinking," named after tentacular species, such as spiders and vines, who "make attachments and detachments; they [m]ake cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open and knotted in some ways and not others" (Haraway, *Staying* 31). In Haraway's approach, humans exist in various multispecies engagements with the potential to terraform (symbiosis, sympoiesis, and symanimagensis). As such, humans can respond; they are response-able for the role the species in general plays in not just the turning of keys, but the creation of keys. As an individual, one might be tempted to claim that one is not responsible in the Anthropocene for the creation of keys, removing oneself from the response-ability of keys and their various turnings. To rectify this problem, Morton suggests that "formal responsibility is strongly reinforced by causal responsibility" (*Dark Ecology* 8). In essence,

to successfully accept formal responsibility, the individual must assert that, as part of the human species, turning my key *is* the cause of climate change and therefore I, like all humans, am responsible and thus response-able. I am terraforming through multispecies entanglements. But, Morton's solution does not necessarily make space for the individual (or the human species) to respond with solutions, only acknowledgments. In contrast, Haraway's ability to respond relies upon a shift from Anthropic thinking (acknowledgments) to Chthulucentric living (responses). The individual subject must acknowledge and respond to the fact that one is both an individual and part of a collective; they are rhizomatic and engaging in zombific thinking. In ecoGothic zombie video games, the opportunity for player characters to achieve this is made possible by the rhizombie.

The Last of Us posits the individual as not being responsible for climate change due, in part, to its use of the cinematic turn. The video game relieves the individual of perceived responsibility by setting the player up as if they have the agency to make decisions that will impact the world in the video game, yet the game also limits those decisions when it shifts to a cut scene. For example, I have closely examined my partner play many video games, partly for the sake of my research. Recently, while playing the final "boss battle" in the video game *Uncharted* (2007), he expressed frustration when the video game switched to a cutscene for a cinematic depiction of his character—Nathan Drake—defeating Navarro. My partner expressed, "just for once, I'd like to give the final death blow." His response highlights how player control is often removed in many games during the final "death blow" against the "big boss" to contribute to the cinematic turn in video games. This is when a video game ceases momentarily to be a video game and instead becomes more like a film. Brian Collins points out that video games have become more like cinema due to advancements in photorealistic graphics combined with larger teams of developers. During dramatic moments in the game, such as the "big boss" battle, cutscenes allow for more dramatic angles (Collins). According to Collins, an increase in cinematic elements in video games signals an identity crisis on the part of the medium, noting how players are now spending just as much, and sometimes more, time watching as they do playing; however, David Ehrlich and Tyler Hersko point out that the two have always been interconnected. While cinematic video games have been criticized for the loss of player agency (Collins), what this really reveals are the shifting interconnections between storytelling and technology. For instance, Ehrlich and Hersko

argue that early video games were primarily devoid of stories, leaving gameplay to dominate, but newer developments offer "narrative potential," so gameplay needs to adjust to make space for new forms of storytelling, especially environmental storytelling.

The Incubation Period: Getting to the Root of Zombie Video Games

The continued success of the zombie narrative relies upon the multi-faceted and highly adaptable nature of the zombie, which is why Jerrold E. Hogle has dubbed it to be a "floating signifier" (3). Consequently, the zombie is not specific to any medium, although its success has largely been tied to visual media, such as film and comic books, and its birth into American popular culture is primarily linked to *White Zombie* (Bishop, *American* 10). The zombie can infect literature, film, television, graphic novels, and yes, video games. Kyle William Bishop argues that the zombie subgenre was in danger of dying out during the 1990s when, he argues, "no new or original stories were produced" (*American* 16). Bishop's argument is predicated on the idea that "The United States of the 1990s was perhaps too financially secure, too politically stable, to foster socially and culturally critical fear-inducing films," resulting in the rise (and subsequent rapid descent) of the "allegorical" zombie (Bishop, *American* 180). Instead, the zombie found new life, so to speak, in the video game mode, which Bishop argues acted as an "incubator" until the zombie's stronger re-emergence in the twenty-first century (*American* 16),[66] largely in response to 9/11 (*American* 35). Bishop's initial argument, however, overlooks the social and cultural roles of video games when he claims the climate in America was too stable to foster the existence of zombies in film.[67] Bishop's statement seems to suggest that film is the primary medium in which social and cultural criticism can arise. Moreover, he suggests the zombie's period of allegory was

[66] The incubation effect has also been coined as "the *Resident Evil* Effect" by Jamie Russell because the preservation of the zombie subgenre in the 1990s relied primarily upon the success of *Resident Evil* and the emergence of "survival horror" within video game culture (Bishop *How Zombies*, 131).

[67] Debates surrounding the moral and social implications of video games, especially those in which violence is a primary component, such as zombie ones, have been ongoing since video games first emerged (Ferguson 68). This chapter does not seek to make any such arguments about behaviour; however, it is important to note that recent studies suggest "video games may be effective in communicating raw data or information, but they aren't effective in transmitting moral beliefs, personality traits, and so forth" (Ferguson 76). Essentially, they can be used as effective tools for education about climate issues but cannot effectively alter one's ideology in relation to the environment.

relegated to specific time when, I argue, it has always been allegorical. In response, I seek to address what Bishop has overlooked. In his follow-up book, however, *How Zombies Conquered Popular Culture*, he claims that "the game-playing realm is where some of the most exciting recent zombie development and evolution have occurred" (Bishop 131).

While zombies appear in video games as early as 1982 with Atari 2600's *Entombed*,[68] they did not garner much attention until 1996 when PlayStation released *Resident Evil*,[69] a Japanese survival horror video game created by Shinji Mikami and Tokuro Fujiwara. In *Resident Evil*, the Special Tactics and Rescue Service (S.T.A.R.S.) Alpha Team are deployed after the S.T.A.R.S. Bravo Team disappears while investigating a series of unexplained deaths in Racoon Forest. Upon their arrival, they are attacked by a pack of infected dogs, and the team members find themselves trapped within Spencer Mansion—a dark, Gothic, mazelike space filled with monsters. Throughout the video game, the player learns that the Umbrella Corporation has been developing bioweapons in a laboratory inside the mansion, and a sample of the Tyrant Virus (T-Virus)—one of the bioweapons—is released. The virus infects everything inside the mansion, turning them into zombies, which are then responsible for the mysterious deaths in Raccoon Forest. The game uses isometric gameplay, and players can play as either Chris Redfield or Jill Valentine, two members of the S.T.A.R.S. Alpha Team. Due to the limited gameplay options, players do not necessarily have the option of playing differently—regardless of which character they choose, they still wander the same dark, narrow hallways and are tasked with destroying whatever monsters they encounter. As such, the video game has quite a small possibility space in terms of character development and player emergence.

[68] *Entombed* was one of many maze-themed video games that dominated the industry in the 1970s and 80s (Baraniuk). While the design appears simple to the player, and thus possibility space is seemingly quite limited, because there was not enough memory space on the systems to hold the programming required for a maze, the programming for *Entombed* randomly generated mazes (Baraniuk). As such, players of *Entombed* never played the same maze twice, so the video game is an early example of seemingly unquantifiable possibility space. While researchers have determined that a table of values was designed for this code to function, they cannot seem to reverse engineer or recreate the table (Baraniuk); thus, the possibility space of the first zombie video game cannot be recreated in contemporary video games.

[69] *Resident Evil* was initially released in Japan under the name *Biohazard* (Bishop *American* 16).

Midway through the game, the player enters a room in Spencer Mansion and encounters a giant infected plantlike creature that Haraway might call "tentacular" (see fig. 35). The player shoots the creature, and it appears to shrivel up before regrowing, extending its limbs, wrapping them around the player character, and lifting them into the air. The creature's appendages are unquantifiable, and the other parts of its body are lost amidst the darkness and into the unscene—that is, the parts of the video game space that never appear onscreen but are still largely written into the story deep within what does appear. It is as if the infected plantlike creature is an extension of the mansion. The 2008 remastered version of the game includes a similar scene, but the infected plant arises from the base of a fountain instead of from the ceiling (see fig. 36). In contrast to its parent narrative, this "remastered" plant cannot be destroyed merely by shooting it; the player must kill the plant by adding chemicals to an irrigation system and playing with the controls to reroute the water into the fountain. In this manner, the infected plantlike creature in the remastered version requires a different approach than the way the player fights other infected creatures. Whereas it can be argued that the creature in the 1996 game is not necessarily a plant given its separation from the natural world, this argument does not explain the presence of the greenhouse-like atmosphere or the fact that the player must use an irrigation system to destroy the infected creature in the remastered version. The tentacularity of the remastered plant resembles that of the creature in the original and thus overlays it with plantlike signifiers. Regardless, the plantlike creature begs attention: in a

Figure 36: The plantlike creature in *Resident Evil*, 1996.

Figure 35: The plantlike creature in *Resident Evil Remastered*, 2008.

world dominated by infected fauna, the inclusion of a single, infected flora roots (so to speak) the *Resident Evil* video game within the field of ecoGothic.

Ecological Gothic, or ecoGothic, is a subgenre of the Gothic whereby the environment is represented as monstrous or dangerous (Deckard 174), threatening the human species and revealing the shattered relationship between the two. EcoGothic typically deals with "sites of monstrous fecundity that threaten human civilization, where vines and vegetation run rampant, or where plagues and vermin spread deliriums," where "nature itself becomes a character" in the text (Deckard 174), which is evident in the many infected, monstrous creatures that are housed in Spencer Mansion. Sharae Deckard argues that ecoGothic narratives accredit "a capacity for retribution to a vengeful Nature," rooting (pun intended) Gothic excess within larger "cultural anxieties about the human relationship to the non-human world through uncanny apparitions of monstrous nature" (Deckard 174). For example, the infected plant that appears in both the 1996 version of *Resident Evil* and the 2008 remastered game are larger than life versions of their previous uninfected selves that arise from humans experimenting with bioweapons; they reside at the entanglement between contagion and climate catastrophe. EcoGothic is generally connected with human exploration or experimentation whereby the environment suffers for the sake of human "progress." Justin D. Edwards, Rune Graulund, and Johan Höglund suggest that "To realize we live in the Anthropocene is to recognize that the border that has separated the Anthropos from nature was always an illusion" (xv), and the zombie evidently breaches this illusory border in an attempt to shift Anthropic thinking to zombific thinking. In ecoGothic, "Human spaces are suddenly haunted by monstrous creatures who insist, by their very presence inside human dwellings, that transgression is the new normal, and that hiding from nature is pointless" (Edwards, Garulun, and Höglund xvi). In both versions of *Resident Evil*, this transgression is literal: the infected plantlike creatures not only appear inside Spencer Mansion, but, in their monstrosity, occupy the entire room in which they appear, insisting on their own presence and leaving little space through their tentacularity for the player to explore. In this manner, the tentacularity and ecoGothic qualities of the infected plant limit possibility space, and from their onset in *Resident Evil*, zombie video games have drawn on aspects of ecoGothic interwoven with contagion to critique human interference and lack of response-ability toward

the environment. As such, *Resident Evil* and other zombie video games are prime examples of the rhizombie.

One of the earliest examples of ecoGothic in the zombie subgenre is *Night of the Living Dead* in which a television broadcast reveals that the possible cause of the zombie epidemic is "radiation" from an exploded space probe. Kerstin Oloff refers to the resulting monster as the first example of "the *petro-zombie*" (317)—a zombie arising from the effects of American petroculture. Anxieties about outer-space were prolific in the 1960s and became a kind of epidemic infecting the American imaginary due to the Space Race. At the end of WWII, German scientist and inventor of the V2 rocket-powered missile, Wernher von Braun, surrendered to the United States (Hudak 20). Afterward, America and the Soviet Union gained access to V2 technology, and they both reacted by investing more time and money into space research, resulting in the two nations engaging in a technological battle called the Space Race (Hudak 20). However, the Space Race did not operate alone in affecting the American social milieu nor its potential impact on Romero's film. America was also in the midst of the Cold War (1947-1991) with the Soviet Union, resulting in nuclear paranoia (Bishop, *American* 102), fears of invasion and domination (Bishop, *How Zombies* 9), and the public's growing distrust of their own government and military (Soles 534) as discussed in Chapter 2. Carter Soles argues that 1960s America was also questioning the *status quo* in light of not only the Civil Rights Movement and anti-Vietnam movements but in rising environmental concerns (532). After all, the Clean Air Act (1963) and the Water Quality Control Act (1965) had just been established, demonstrating increasing scrutiny regarding the regulation of environmental damage (Soles 532). *Night of the Living Dead* is praised for locating human causes of environmental destruction "more explicitly and directly" (Soles 527) even as it resists pointing to a single cause; consequently, this is where *Night of the Living Dead*'s ecoGothic impulse is apt and transformative: it suggests that environmental destruction results from a multitude of overlapping, human-led causes. The combination of social and political upheavals that coalesced in 1960s America, while manifesting as an unexpected and somewhat apocalyptic zombie epidemic in *Night of the Living Dead*, nevertheless represent what John Robert McNeill (328) and Carolyn Merchant (178) identify as the "quotidian" or "everyday." This is the idea that the "ordinary world would have come to be seen in increasingly apocalyptic, environmental terms" (Merchant 178). When Bishop

cannot identify significant social and cultural shifts in 1990s America, it is due in part to the zombie becoming absorbed into the quotidian. Thus, zombie video games provided a space for Americans to literally play out their concerns, environmental or otherwise, in the 1990s. As such, the social and cultural anxieties were better suited for the video game mode than for film or television.

Traditionally, ecoGothic narratives have ended with the human species rising back up to overthrow the environment and secure its position as the dominant species, which is what occurs in both *Resident Evil*—at least the first video game—and *Night of the Living Dead*. More recent narratives, including *The Last of Us,* though, have challenged this outcome. Twenty-first century ecoGothic narratives begin to collapse distinctions between humans and nature by resisting a return to human dominance; in video games, this collapse engenders a response-ability to develop less emergent and more realistic gameplay, however difficult and costly that may be. "Emergence" in video game design was first coined by Marc LeBlanc and refers to the way in which the story in a video game emerges from the player's interactions with the possibility space and the elements it contains (Abraham).[70] Leigh Alexander's advice on designing emergence in video games is to build systems that are "predictable and consistent […] but not pre-determined." He suggests that designers should "have a variety of object properties with plausible or simulated effects" or what he calls "let[ting] water be water." While his mantra invokes water specifically, he is referring to the environment more broadly and how game designers should render it by way of a set of pre-programmed properties basically on a loop in the background. Alexander's reduction of the environment to virtual "objects," while somewhat true in the sense of the video game design and the virtual world, suggests that the environment is often considered to be somewhat static and non-living. His advice that it should be one of the elements that is predictable due to the "plausibility" of how it exists in the real world demonstrates a particularly Anthropocentric perspective on the environment when it comes to climate change, or perhaps an ideology of "man" having conquered nature. Amanda Phillips calls this "algorithmic ecology" whereby "automated computational processes govern nature in the game and in many ways, thanks to

[70] For example, in the 1989 Japanese zombie video game *Sweet Home* (スウィートホーム, Suīto Hōmu), the ending is dependent upon which characters the player saves because each one has a particular skillset. In this manner, the ending emerges from the player's engagement with the game's possibility space. Interestingly, the game also suggests that NPCs have a larger impact on the outcome.

the aesthetic design and game mechanics, subsume the eco-logical within the mathematical" (109). Consequently, while emergent gameplay can increase possibility space for the player, it relies upon the environment existing within a preset, predictable, objectified, and non-living framework; therefore, player possibility space can too often be developed at the expense of the environment.

A. Phillips argues that algorithmic ecology is not necessarily "anti-ecological" because "operational radius is necessary for system performance in a theoretically infinite world, but it has important implications on play" (111). In fact, Phillips points out that Morton may find it to be a relevant space to explore their call to remove nature from ecological thinking (109). However, if one actually "let water be water," as Alexander would say, it would be one of the elements with which human response-ability is prominently called into question, and game designers would find it impossible to program. After all, not only is water one of the most unpredictable elements of the environment, but it also carries with it the most obvious markers of human environmental damage and neglect, including great floating garbage patches, rising sea levels due to melting ice, and polluted waterways requiring boiled water advisories in many communities. In *The Last of Us*, water functions primarily as an occasional obstacle because Ellie cannot swim. Joel must swim through areas on his own and find floating objects that Ellie can kneel on while Joel pushes her from one location to the next. In this manner, water in the video game reaffirms Joel as caregiver and cements their relationship, but water itself is not a threat. It appears to have a preset path. As a matter of course, relegating water to the realm of predictable systems in video game programming maintains a narrative of human neglect and irresponsibility where, despite human impact, the waters remain unchanged.

The figure of a transformative, monstrous natural world works differently than a pre-programmed fixed one. Bishop's use of the term "incubator" is therefore more apt if read in the context of the Chthulucene as opposed to the Anthropocene. The term "incubator," meaning a space in which something is cultivated and re-emerges in a different form, draws attention to the function of monsters not merely as figures that embody the anxieties of a society, but as figures that adapt and change in response to shifting sources of anxiety, such as a rapidly shifting landscape. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen says, "the monster's body is a cultural body" ("Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" 4). In *Resident Evil*, there is a singular

infected plantlike creature, but in *The Last of Us*, all the infected zombie figures are plantlike in some manner, demonstrating the emergence of greater environmental concerns, but also their effects on the human body. For Bishop's argument to hold up that America was too stable in the 1990s to support the zombie in film, we would have to ignore the power of the incubator metaphor as a representation of engendering change regardless of the medium. Nowhere is this more apparent than in *Resident Evil* where the infected evolve in unpredictable ways and the zombie pathogen is zoonotic, representing a move away from the human-only pathogens of the video game's zombie referents. *Resident Evil* contains infected dogs, spiders, and, as previously noted, plants; the various physiological responses to the T-virus reveal unique distinctions between each species, and even water can be contaminated as the chemical additives to the 2008 remastered version demonstrate.

The incubator is also a signifier of contagion, referring to the incubation period of a pathogen, making it useful in developing better frameworks for living with contagion and demonstrating how contagion is interconnected with climate change. Waterways in *Resident Evil* are contaminated, and such contamination is not separate from but directly connected to humans. This form of contamination becomes a kind of contagion, demonstrating the interconnectedness of waterways from a regional locatedness to a globalized system. In the "real world," water creates tentacularity, functioning like veins tracing their way through the land, interconnecting with one another, and culminating in larger bodies of water, such as lakes and oceans. The irrigation system in *Resident Evil* acts as a smaller representation of waterway systems, but so too does the incubation of the zombie within the *Resident Evil* universe. All of this can be read within Deleuze and Guattari's reterritorialization, that is, all parts are always already interconnected and part of the same territory.

While *Resident Evil* primarily takes place in a Gothic mansion overrun with zombies and other monsters, zombie video games "were beginning to challenge the traditional notion of the Gothic zombie narrative, taking players outside of the besieged mansion and suggesting a larger conflict and conspiracy" (Bishop, *How Zombies* 29). Prior to the incubation period, zombie narratives largely relegated their survivors to single, regional Gothic spaces, such as the farmhouse in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), or the mall in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). After the incubation period, zombie narratives began to follow droves of survivors roaming the city or countryside, such as in *28 Days Later* (2002) and

World War Z (2013). However, the shift from a static safehouse to wandering the landscape was not relegated to film, the video games themselves shifted during the period of incubation when later zombie video games, such as *Days Gone* and *The Last of Us*, take place across a vast stretch of landscape. The shift in location has engendered more possibility space, or at least the perception of more possibility space, shifting the zombie pathogen from that of epidemic to the status of pandemic.

Finally, the incubator metaphor is indicative of the Gothic mode's preoccupation with reproductive imagery, the potential to produce monstrous offspring. In reproduction, the incubation period is the gestation time. *Resident Evil* was the incubation period for the zombie, which, prior to Danny Boyle's 2004 film, *28 Days Later*, was still focused on slow-moving, supernatural or nuclear/radiation-based pathogens. In *Resident Evil*, the zombie is "reborn" with new abilities and emerges even more monstrous. Eugene Linden argues that America's stance and its public discourse about global warming during the period was mixed, which impaired its ability to convince its own citizens or other nations of the harmful effects of coal and other fossil fuels. Additionally, Linden argues that in the '90s, climate change became increasingly "politicized," and while this politicization peaked a year after the release of *Resident Evil* with the Kyoto Protocols,[71] it is still contingent upon politics paying more attention to the issue, so that ultimately, climate change became associated with the "liberal agenda" (van der Linden 173). Whereas the politicization of the issue resulted in greater attention being paid to climate change, it also seems to have split America into two camps: the exposers of and battlers against climate change on the left and the resisters of those efforts on the right (Druckman and McGrath 111).

Therefore, the anxieties that influenced the new zombie in *Resident Evil* relied not just on climate change and growing concerns surrounding it, but on the fragmentation of the American population's response to the issue. Because the zombie in popular culture is contingent upon the monster being the ultimate "floating signifier" and therefore having the ability to embody contemporary fears, the zombie ecoGothic video game is at this moment tied up with eco-anxiety, catalyzing environmental exposure, and enacting response-ability toward combatting or refusing to combat climate change. *The Last of Us* is thus born from

[71] The Kyoto Protocols are the principles designed by the United Nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but to which America refused to agree (Rafferty).

the shifting and politicizing anxieties of ecoGothic, and nowhere is this more evident than in the shift toward the fungus-based zombie that appears in the video game. The pathogen is literally the environment taking over human minds and bodies. It just had to incubate for a few decades first.

Lichenthropy: Ecological Thinking and Monstrous Morphology

The Last of Us is not exclusive in turning to the fungus. Haraway also draws on the fungus to introduce her concept of the Chthulucene, making her work particularly relevant for understanding the turn to the fungus zombie. After all, she employs this epigraph from Scott Gilbert: "we are all lichens" (*Staying* 30). The lichen is not a singular organism but refers to a symbiotic relationship between a mycobiont, or fungus, and a photobiont, a microscopic component that engages in photosynthesis to provide food for the fungus (Lutzoni and Miadlikowska R502). However, because the symbiotic relationship is so successful, the lichen is often described as a single organism (Lutzoni and Miadlikowska R502). This form of symbiosis is referred to in biology as mutualism (Lutzoni and Miadlikowska R502), which is a relationship in which all species involved benefit (Osterloff). Lichen is considered an "ecological success" because it/they can grow in nearly any climate and on any surface, including but not limited to rocks, wood, soil, concrete, glass, metal, plastic, and even other lichen (Lutzoni and Miadlikowska R502); they are the ultimate agent of reterritorialization; they are rhizomatic. Therefore, Haraway's epigraph suggests that "we" are complex organisms that, while existing as separate entities, are still made up of various elements and interconnected with one another as well as with other "surfaces" in ways that make individuals indistinguishable. Additionally, this interconnection is mutually beneficial for all interconnected species. Morton would call this "*the ecological thought*" whereby "everything is connected […] And the more we consider it, the more our world opens up" (*The Ecological Thought* 1)—or perhaps, the more it engenders possibility space.

In what follows, I refer to this level of deep connection and identification, "lichenthropy," invoking the language of monstrous morphology as well as the morphing of

bodies that is associated with its related term, "lycanthrope."[72] In this manner, I am co-opting the suffix "-thropy," denoting the human Anthropos, and blending it with Haraway's statement that "we are all lichens," denoting the Chthulucene. Lichenthropy is a process of ecological thinking, but it is so much more than this, it is a form of ecological being. Resilience and interconnectivity are not the only reasons why "we" may want to be lichens. Lichens are diverse with "more than 13,500 lichen-forming fungal species" in existence (Lutzoni and Miadlikowska R502). Lichen have medicinal properties, and because they are quite sensitive to pollution, they can be used to monitor its levels (Lutzoni and Miadlikowska R503). As such, the lichen is a member of the Chthulucene, which "does not close in on itself; it does not round off; its contact zones are ubiquitous and continuously spin out loopy tendrils" or rather, medulla and rhizinae (Haraway, *Staying* 33),[73] and through its "collective knowing and doing," it always already cultivates response-ability (*Staying* 34). Thus, in proposing a lichenthropy in the Chthulucene, I argue that the bodies that exist both within and that play ecoGothic video games are implicated and response-able for environmental damage or environmental progress.

While the idea of such interconnectivity seems to suggest expansive gameplay, interconnectivity reveals how possibility space is a series of pre-programmed limitations reinforcing specific ideologies in the video game; all elements affect and are affected by other elements. In Bogost's opinion, "sophisticated interactivity" in video gaming does not require a wide possibility space, but rather, "can produce an effective procedural enthymeme, resulting in more sophisticated procedural rhetoric" (43). According to P. Saxton Brown, "procedural rhetoric occurs between the 'procedural representation' on the computer or TV screen and the body of the user that collaborates in coeffecting that representation" (388). Therefore, Bogost suggests that sophisticated procedural rhetoric relies not necessarily upon the player having a lot of interactive choices, but upon the ability of the game itself (or the creators of the game) to guide the player in the "right" direction while simultaneously

[72] More commonly known as "werewolf," the lycanthrope has appeared as a medical condition as well as a monstrous figure in literature since the 1600s (OED). As a figure of the Gothic that garnered new attention in twentieth century Animal Studies, the lycanthrope "oscillate[s] between nature and culture" and "is characterized by a new-found sympathy" in response to extinction narratives (Franck and George 144).

[73] Medulla are the fungal cells that appear tentacular whereas the rhizinae are the rootlike structures that attach lichen to various surfaces.

creating the illusion of player agency. Successful procedural rhetoric is dependent upon the collapsing of distinctions in the game, so that the shift between play and the cinematic turn in video games, as well as the shift between characters, is as seamless as the mycobiont and the photobiont in the lichen. Essentially, both elements of the lichen/thrope are not considered parts, so the transformation is not liminal or separate from the static states that combine to form the lichenthrope.

Even though in *The Last of Us*, transformation is a pre-programmed limitation, it is also potentially Chthulucentric because its lichenthropy manifests in character attachment between the player, the various characters they play, and the monsters. The player plays primarily as Joel—the all-American rugged Texas hero (see fig. 37). As Joel, the player travels across the US, reinforcing the myths of individualist freedom and Manifest Destiny whilst riding horses, driving trucks, and, of course, saving (and killing) whomever he chooses. But at times, the player must be Ellie—the fourteen-year-old girl reading comic books—while also engaging in complex character development with Joel. The player as Joel must smuggle Ellie to the Capital building in Boston whereby the Fireflies—the resistance group in the game—are waiting to use her immune blood to synthesize a vaccine. The player does not choose which character they want to be but is forced to play as Joel and is then abruptly thrust into Ellie's body midway through the game. After Joel is injured by a group of cannibals operating under the leadership of a non-player character (NPC) called David, a cutscene depicts him and Ellie fleeing on horseback before Joel finally passes out and falls to the ground. Abruptly, the scene shifts to winter and the player is forced to play as Ellie. I emphasize "forced" here to highlight how the player must play as certain characters not of their choosing but because the game and storyline are

Figure 37: Ellie and Joel riding horseback in *The Last of Us*, 2013.

contingent upon the involvement of the player as a certain character at specific moments to further the narrative.

Throughout the game, the player encounters strategic stock characters, including David, a kind of "big boss," who threatens to rape and kill Ellie, often succeeding to do so if the player as Ellie cannot fight him off. Working from his own experience in the game, Bishop notes how the game "places gamers in even more perilous and vulnerable situations when they control Ellie" (*How Zombies* 144). In the scene with David, Bishop admits,

> I repeatedly failed at sneaking up on David, and, as a result, I was forced to watch him butcher Ellie over and over with his machete, a murder made all the more upsetting thanks to realistic Foley sound effects and a chilling music cue. The recurring death scenes only heightened my anxiety for my vulnerable avatar,[74] making each attempt to attack David all the more challenging. (*How Zombies* 144).

Bishop's fluctuation between the idea that he "controls" Ellie but is "forced" to watch her die reveals the myth of agency that accompanies possibility space. Anxiety, and perhaps trauma, is produced by the simultaneous control and lack of control coupled with repetition. When a player must "repeat the experience over and over until she [or he or they] performs acceptably" (Hancock 168), a narrative of behavioural conditioning occurs, which eventually constructs player ideology. Hancock reinforces the interconnectedness of this action by emphasizing collapsed time in Gothic video games more generally:

> the player is faced with ghosts of repetition coming and going: the ghost of the future, flawless performance and the ghost of the past failure, both moments that no longer exist in the game's memory, but persist in the player's mind. The notion of the skilled player—the gamer—depends on the erasure and elimination of those ghosts. (168)

According to Hancock, the result of repetition to the point of acceptability creates "the uncanny consciousness" (172). Because the "gamer" is not haunted by repetition, the "potential for gothic-like destabilization" appears to collapse (Hancock 169); however, because this repetition also leads to an uncanny consciousness, I argue that the fear produced

[74] Avatar is not the correct term here. In video games, an avatar is a representation of the player. In this case, Bishop means character.

by the Gothic-like aspects of the ecological video game does not dissipate, but becomes absorbed into the unconscious in a way that makes the player only occasionally aware of the constant presence of the Gothic. Ellie's position in physical space also seems to collapse while Bishop is both playing as and yet watching Ellie, an uncanny by-product of the third-person over-the-shoulder perspective. The uncanniness of this gaming perspective is heightened at the moment of death when the camera swings around to a profile or frontal view of the character and moves backward as in a parallax filmic technique; the abrupt switch in perspective coupled with a violent death destabilizes the player and heightens their future vulnerability. In this moment, the player is also thrust out of Ellie's body—a literal out-of-body experience, a kind of top-down haunting, and a way to remind the player that they are a body both within and separate from the environment in the video game.

Because the player never chooses which character to be, they are oftentimes involuntarily thrust not only in and out of bodies but also between bodies. Hence, their relationship to the characters can result in multiple, overlapping forms of attachment, such as recognition, alignment, and allegiance. But, there are also forms of detachment. The player plays the majority of *The Last of Us* as Joel, and the game uses recognition—external features, quips, cutscenes, and relationships with other characters, for example (Lankoski 300)—to construct Joel as the all-American rugged hero.[75] Phillips notes how "computational representations of natural environments open up new orientations toward nature that easily read as fantasies of capitalist frontier expansionism enabled by the reduced material constrains of the digital" (106). Essentially, Joel's character is reduced to a fantasy of American frontier expansionism, and by playing as Joel, the player can engage in this fantasy. The player accomplishes this through a process called alignment, which, according to Petri Lankoski, is the "kind of access a player has to a character's actions, knowledge, body state, and affects, and how this access is structured within the progression of a game" (Lankoski 306). Joel is designed as the character who can easily conquer the frontier; he never backs down from a fight, and there are hints throughout the game that he has a violent history that results from navigating a zombie-infested America. The third-person, over-the-

[75] Joel is revealed to be from Texas, and he upholds signifiers of the American frontier cowboy—wearing plaid with a rifle slung across his back, and easily taking to horseback riding. Oftentimes, he replies with "yes ma'am" when responding to women, and during the cutscene where he and Ellie are driving in a pickup truck, they are listening to "Alone and Forsaken" by Hank Williams, a classic country song that Joel calls, "a winner."

shoulder perspective enhances player lichenthropy via alignment as the player is in a constant state of recognizing themselves as Joel. Recognition limits possibility space, since Joel exists primarily as a fixed character: his traits are largely pre-established, and the player has very little opportunity to alter or defer from those traits. However, the recognition of characters in video games, as opposed to films, allows the player to engage in more possibility space by filling in the gaps with their own gameplay. Through recognition with Joel, the player can more confidently conquer enemies, knowing that Joel is capable, which is something that, as Bishop states, is lacking when the player engages in recognition with Ellie.

Lichenthropy also becomes more prominent when a player develops allegiance with their character. Murray Smith argues, "To become allied with a character, the spectator [player] must evaluate the character as representing a morally desireable (or at least preferable) set of traits, in relation to other characters" (187).[76] Thus, allegiance is the point at which the player's "moral and aesthetic evaluation of characters" (Lankoski 303; citing Smith 188) becomes an essential part of the attachment. In the case of Joel, even though he is dangerous and has a violent past, he is ultimately established as the "good guy" whose violence is represented as primarily the only course of action to save Ellie. In this manner, he is developed as a kind of father figure, who, by whatever means necessary, protects his surrogate daughter. By the time the player plays as Ellie, her innocence and vulnerability are firmly established as counter to Joel's experience and violence, so that there is even less possibility space available to play her as capable of conquering the frontier. Part of the shift toward a more vulnerable gameplay stems from Ellie's programming, which limits both her weapons skills and hand-to-hand combat skills until later in the game when she learns from Joel, but part of the shift can also stem from player recognition and allegiance with her as a child in need of protection. In doing so, the player—as per the game programming—maintains her childhood innocence, especially because Joel has tried to maintain said innocence, but also, this is a way of placing her in less dangerous situations within the game. Joel and Ellie require one another for survival as they trek across the overrun American landscape, and the player's insertion into this relationship lichenizes it, turning it into a something symbiotic. This lichenthropy highlights how the body is not an individualized

[76] Smith's original argument is in relation to characters in film; however, Petri Lankoski applies Smith's theories to video games as well.

container. Consequently, the video game lends itself to a Chthulucentric reading as the player becomes rhizomatic, a connector or bridge between the characters. As the characters develop a closer bond throughout the game, the player literally embodies this connection by seeing themselves reflected in the Other whenever they are forced into that body.

Even so, *The Last of Us II* complicates and challenges character attachment and identification, pointing to the complexities of measuring possibility space as well as the limits of lichenthropy in the Chthulucene. *The Last of Us II* takes place five years after the events of the first game and has two parallel storylines. The first follows Ellie as she initially navigates life in Jackson, Wyoming and officially comes out as a lesbian. After she witnesses Joel's death at the hands of the remaining Fireflies—who are now part of the Washington Liberation Front (WLFs)—she embarks on a revenge mission to the WLFs home base in Seattle, Washington. The second storyline follows Abby, the daughter of the doctor Joel kills at the end of the first video game. After Abby kills Joel in front of Ellie and returns to Seattle, Ellie catches up to Abby, resulting in a violent and tense standoff.

What complicates player attachment in *The Last of Us II* is that the player must oscillate between playing as both Ellie and Abby. Abby is initially established to be the antagonist of the game, which player attachment complicates. If the player experienced the first game, they would have already established attachment with Joel and Ellie, and in the early parts of *The Last of Us II*, the player spends time engaging in the video game as both Abby and Ellie. This player attachment is complicated when, as Ellie, the player must witness Abby torturing and killing Joel. Essentially, they witness one of their attachments killing another of their attachments from the perspective of a third attachment. Consequently, the second game has received mixed and negative reviews (Erb, Lee, and Doh 2). The game presents two showdowns between Abby and Ellie, which provide the player with the opportunity to fight as both of the characters they develop attachment with, but in doing so, they are always fighting themselves. Earlier, I highlighted how the cinematic turn in video games results in players rarely having the opportunity to administer the final "death blow" in the "boss battle." *The Last of Us II* presents a different kind of cinematic ending where the cinematic turn does not result in the final death blow but, instead, results in both characters releasing one another. The potential in this complicated character relationship and forced character attachment is that it reveals lichenthropy to be dependent not necessarily upon

positive character attachment but upon attachment that develops through similar experiences of trauma. After all, Abby and Ellie have both lost their fathers or father figures in violent, entangled ways.

The first game maintains positive character attachment. The game culminates in Lake City where Ellie is at risk of being killed and dismembered by the Fireflies in the hopes of developing a vaccine. It is revealed that to synthesize a vaccine, Ellie must perish because the fungus "inside her has somehow mutated" (*The Last of Us*), which is why she is immune. The *Cordyceps* grows all over the brain, and as such, it is interconnected with Ellie, and to remove it would result in her death. Ellie's death would be an individual sacrifice to save the masses, and it requires an Anthropocentric approach. In developing a vaccine, the Fireflies would save the human species, but they would be performing a lichenectomy of sorts, separating the human from the fungus and re-establishing a narrative of human dominance over the environment and relegating the environment back into the background. In the end, Joel is faced with the decision to either leave an unconscious Ellie behind or to rescue her (*The Last of Us*). In the penultimate chapter when Joel finds Ellie under anesthetic and prepped for surgery in the Firefly lab surrounded by unarmed nurses and a doctor, with no soldiers in sight, the doctor begs Joel to just take the girl and leave. The game suggests that, as Joel, the player has encountered possibility space where they can either leave without harming anyone or kill the doctor and/or nurses. Unlike the two bullets scenario at the beginning of the game, there is no indication as to whether killing the doctor is the "right" decision. There are no signifiers suggesting that the player should press the shoot button on their controller. However, the game will not let the player leave the room until they kill the doctor, so while the game suggests the existence of more possibility space, it immediately undermines this promise by forcing the player to kill the doctor. After killing the doctor and rescuing an unconscious Ellie, the player finds themselves in a standoff with Marlene, head of the Fireflies. Marlene invokes the possibility space when she says, "you can still do the right thing here" (*The Last of Us*), suggesting that the player will ultimately be faced with making the decision moments later. However, the video game again removes player agency by switching to a cutscene of Joel driving along the highway out of Lake City. Moments of suspense pass as the expression on Joel's face suggests that he is trying to deal with whether he made the right decision before Ellie is finally revealed laying in the backseat. A flashback

reveals a scene mirroring the trapped survivor from the beginning as a bloody Marlene begs for her life before Joel shoots her. Later, in the American wilderness, Joel lies to Ellie about the cure before the pair walk off manifest-destiny style toward Jackson.

Because *The Last of Us* is an American zombie narrative, Joel and Ellie are always already destined to encounter fear but to also win and to ride off into the figurative sunset regardless of how the player plays the video game. However, unlike other American zombie narratives, the ending is an example of the Chthulucene. Ellie is the unique rhizomatic figure who is both plant-like—a lichenthrope—but also an individualized being and saving her is the moment when Joel can also enter the Chthulucene. Ellie's immunity means she is both interconnected with the fungus in myriad ways and thus response-able to it, but also, in more complex ways, her humanness relies upon the presence of the fungus—and Joel's saving of her supports this relationship. The fungus ensures she is both human and not quite human. The last possibility space that appears in *The Last of Us* seemingly presents the player with the choice to save the signifier of the Chthulucene—Ellie—or to save the rest of the world. In saving Ellie, despite being solely motivated by his desire to protect Ellie, Joel condemns the human species to a continued existence in a fungi-dominating world—he maintains the zombie pandemic.

Consequently, in doing so, he also saves the environment. The world in *The Last of Us* is all greenery, a world where reduced human populations have lessened the impacts of industry and other human-led environmental damage. Had Joel let Ellie die so that the Fireflies could develop a vaccine, the reestablishment of human dominance, like most pre-twenty-first century ecoGothic narratives, would result in environmental destruction again. Lichenthropy, derived from Morton's ecological thought, relies upon ongoing contagion, and demonstrates how contagion and climate change are interrelated. Morton represents ecological thought as "a virus," one "that infects all other areas of thinking" and as such, it has to do with everything, but above all, "It has to do with coexistence" (*The Ecological Thought* 2). Therefore, ecological thinking, and its actionable counterpart, lichenthropy, cannot exist in a world with a synthesized vaccine; the fungus must coexist alongside and intertwined with the human.

Rhizombies: Contagious Coexistence, Monstrous Mycelium, and Evolution

In *The Last of Us*, contagious coexistence can occur through the characterization of the environment and its relationship with the fungi monsters. The zombies in *The Last of Us* are infected with the *Cordyceps* fungus. Of the 400 or so species of *Cordyceps* (Sung et al. 6), the species in *The Last of Us* is supposed to be "a fantastic variation of the entomopathogenic fungus *Ophiocordyceps Unilateralis*" (Bishop, *How Zombies* 132). This class of *Cordyceps* contains the most diverse forms; referred to as a "species complex," it consists of a set of closely related species sharing sight-image signifiers (Sung et al. 38)—that is, signifiers that are alike and oftentimes indistinguishable from one another. The *Ophiocordyceps Unilateralis*'s primary host is the adult ant (Sung et al. 55), and unsurprisingly, they are called "zombie ants" (Harmon), highlighting the fungi's ability to infect, adapt, incubate, produce fear, and propagate just as their film-based popular culture referents, the zombies, do. The infected ant is forced to climb a tree and attach itself to the underside of a leaf in what is conveniently termed "the death grip" where the fungus will blossom, ensuring maximum dispersal for their spores ("Jungles"). The *Planet Earth* documentary calls *Cordyceps* "something out of science fiction" ("Jungles"), which suggests that because it is so similar to something from a zombie film, scientists can only talk about it in terms of zombie narratives (Evans et al. 1; Sample) and have trouble accepting its real worldness. Similar to the "zombie ant," the infected in *The Last of Us* eventually attach themselves to a wall or ceiling in a final death grip and release spores into the air, which limits the possibility space as players must either avoid these areas or don a gas mask and tiptoe through spaces with limited visibility. When the zombie employs the death grip, it releases its mycelium, which are branching, thread-like fingers spreading along a surface, and are uncannily tentacular and rhizomatic.

Cordyceps and the Chthulucene share similar sight-images with mycelium in the sign system. This is not to state that they mean the same thing; after all, the relationship between signifiers and their referents is arbitrary to begin with, but their shared sight-images conjure up similar referents or signified. Adams notes that "sight-images are both cultural *and* natural. They have not only a *contingent* (arbitrary and conventional) connection to signifieds (concepts) but also a *necessary* connection, in one respect or another, to objects (referents)"

(154). However, the exception to the arbitrary nature of the sign is the "comparison" because it allows for seemingly arbitrary signifiers to stand in for something else, and eventually become "readymade" signifiers (qtd. in Adams 153) just as the zombie can function as a ready-made metaphor for many things. During the opening credits for the first *The Last of Us*, a series of *Cordyceps* or Chthulucentric images appear and grow and connect in a way that invokes other tentacular sight-images, such as mycelium, snow, brain synapses (which is why it perhaps attaches so well to Ellie's brain), spider webs, coral, veins, and vines. Adams notes that "in psychoanalytic ontology there is never a perception of a referent without a projection onto it […] the implication is that all images are […] examples of the *psychical construction of reality*" (137). Therefore, the vein-like vines that adorn the walls of the environment in the video game or the vine-like veins carrying blood and the accompanying fungus through the bodies of the infected reveal the collapse of arbitrary distinctions between sight-images in ecoGothic.

In a description of how *Cordyceps* works on the ant's body, Katherine Harmon notes that "the [zombie] ant plunges its mandibles into the juicy main vein of a leaf and soon dies." The storytelling flare that Harmon employs reveals how the plant as signifier slips and collapses into other species signifiers because whatever flows in the veins of the leaf is bloodlike and at risk of infection similar to the irrigation system in *Resident Evil*. The spread of *Cordyceps* may be the solution to ending the human destruction of the environment because the collapse of the signifier allows for an intertwining between the human and other species—or a shift from the Anthropocene to the Chthulucene. As a result, the Chthulucene calls for extended response-ability outside what the human owes the human species to include what all species owe to one another. For example, in the spore-filled spaces in *The Last of Us*, the only things at risk are human survivors and the buildings themselves. Other greenery grows quite well, so that various types of plants exist in a new complex ecosystem that can invade the non-plant bodies entering the space. Similarly, the *Planet Earth* documentary focuses on how *Cordyceps* can benefit biodiversity: "parasites like these [*Cordyceps*] stop any one group of animal getting the upper hand" ("Jungles"). In this manner, the fungus is a crucial embodiment of the twenty-first century ecoGothic's obsession with resisting human dominance at the expense of environmental damage. The vagueness of *Cordyceps'* sight-images means that it can represent any and all signifiers of

interconnectedness, making it rhizomatic within the Chthulucene. Haraway states that "an unfurling Gaia is better situated in the Chthulucene, an ongoing temporality that resists figuration and dating and demands myriad names" (*Staying* 51), such as those sight-image signifiers listed above. Therefore, *The Last of Us* can be figured as a representation of many forms of interconnectedness including ecological thought, lichenthropy, the rhizombie, and the Chthulucene.

In zombie video games, Haraway's unfurling Gaia manifests within the other quality that is a biproduct of the video game incubator: the evolved zombie. The environment does not change between the first *The Last of Us* video game and its sequel despite the second game taking place five years later: the grass is the same height; the buildings seem to have decayed to a specific condition and remain unchanged, and climate change in general seems to have halted at a very specific moment. The only signifiers of time elapsing between the first and second game are the characters aging and the zombies evolving. The human and zombie change but the environment does not in a way that reveals the video game's engagement with Alexander's concept, "let water be water." The evolved zombie appears in multiple forms, dependent upon how long the person has been infected, thus undergirding its own temporality. For instance, in *The Last of Us*, the fourth stage of infection—the "bloater"—is a slower zombie but is also stronger and more aggressive. Its body is covered in layers of fungus that act as armor, so that the player can only defeat it by running away or setting it on fire. A variant of the bloater, called the "shambler," tears off parts of its own body and lobs them at the player. Wherever the parts land, they explode into spores like tiny plant bombs. In *The Last of Us II*, the infected have reached even more advanced stages, embodying the time between the two games. In this game, the infected that have attached themselves to surfaces can become mobile again. If the player comes near one of these infected, the zombie will tear itself free from its surface and try to infect the player. In both instances, the infected seek to extend the fungus beyond their own bodies in myriad ways—as airborne projectiles and as extensions of the surfaces to which they once adhered. As the zombie evolves, its reterritorialization increases. Moreover, the evolved zombie represents the environment existing beyond the background; instead, the environment becomes the antagonist, entering into the narrative as a character. Even though the infected in *The Last of Us* video games are still pre-programmed entities, by becoming antagonists they become

absorbed into the more sophisticated procedural rhetoric that is largely lacking when the environment exists only as background. Lawrence May argues that "Ecological monstrosity declares to us that our relegation of greenhouse gases, rising sea levels, toxic waste, species extinction, and much more, to the discursive periphery has only been temporary," as in ecoGothic more broadly, which states the environment will rise against humans, ecological monstrosity ensures that when the environment does rise up, it will have a body, it will be a character, and it will resist relegation to the background just as the latter stages of the infection in *The Last of Us II* reveal. According to Abraham, "environmental storytelling evokes the sense of a living, active world with a prior history or backstory that predates the current game world or the state that it is in." Therefore, evolved zombies are the unfurling Gaia underpinned by temporality, gesturing to both the past and the future, and characterizing the environment in much more complex forms of environmental storytelling.

The use of the *Cordyceps* fungus also posits the human as akin to the insect because this virus originally infected insects. This is, of course, not a new idea, and zombie narratives of the twenty-first century have increasingly adopted the insect metaphor. For example, in the 2013 film adaptation of *World War Z,* when the zombies are climbing the wall into Israel, they begin to pile on one another, forming a stack of indistinguishable bodies much as ants do.[77] The insect metaphor interrogates the Anthropocene, collapsing the categorical human. As ecological culture and environmental storytelling, *The Last of Us* furthers environmental discourse, yet as a video game, it also perpetuates a narrative contributing to climate change.

In contrast to film, the video game allows the player to participate in a more multi-sensory experience of the Chthulucene by not only experiencing the narrative via sound and sight as with film, but via touch, through the pressing of buttons, the toggling of joysticks, and controller haptic feedback, such as vibrations. The video game industry is thus weirdly weird. Morton states that "unintended consequences are *weirdly weird* in the sense that they are uncanny, unexpected fallout from the myth of progress: for every seeming forward motion of the drillbit there is a backward gyration" (*Dark Ecology* 7). One could make the

[77] The rhizombie framework requires an acknowledgement of the implications of how *World War Z* represents its insect metaphor. While the stack of bodies appears in other moments in the film, it figures most prominently in the Israel scene, adding both a problematic racial and gendered element to the metaphor. In the Israel scene, it is a female Palestinian whose actions initiate the downfall of the safe zone as she grabs a megaphone and begins to chant. As others join in with her, they catch the attention of the zombies outside the walls. The zombies, presumably primarily local infected Palestinians, pile upon one another like insects in order to scale the wall.

same claim for the video game controls or joystick. Colin Milburn points out that videogaming is "a significant factor, a prime suspect, in the intensification of certain environmental problems" (201). As the "prime suspect," the video game medium is a significant contributor to environmental crises. For example, the capacitors of many gaming consoles, including the PlayStation 3 in which *The Last of Us* was originally designed and released, are made from the tantalum found during coltan mining (Milburn 201). During the "PlayStation War" of 2000, a tantalum shortage resulted in Sony being unable to meet the demand for the PlayStation 2 release (Milburn 201). The PlayStation War subsequently resulted in illegal coltan mining, smuggling, war, child labour, deforestation, and the near decimation of the Grauer Gorilla population (Milburn 202). Sony and the PlayStation are therefore rooted in a narrative of environmental destruction. Considering how the makers of *The Last of Us* eagerly released the remastered version within a year of the release of the original, the contribution to waste and tantalum mining was unprecedented.[78] Next to PC, PlayStation released the most games in both 2013 and 2014.[79] Therefore, while the sales of *The Last of Us* and its remastered version are not the sole cause of environmental destruction, the success of them combined with the proliferation of PlayStation games more broadly is the cause. Milburn states, "we therefore cannot speak of the video game without also conjuring a vocabulary of pollution, carbon footprints, greenhouse effects, habitat depletion, extinction: in short, the volatile language of environmental risk" (201). To push a button on the PlayStation is thus to participate in the "volatile language" of environmental crises in much the same way that Morton posits the idea of turning the key to a car.

[78] During its initial release in 2013, *The Last of Us* sold 7 million copies (Carter). Of the seven other games release by Sony for the PlayStation in 2013, *The Last of Us* was ranked second in sales (Wikipedia). When the PlayStation 4 was released the following year, *The Last of Us Remastered* sold an additional 11.78 million copies (Carter), again coming in second out of seven games released that year (Wikipedia).

[79] For comparison purposes, Xbox only released three games in 2013 and another three in 2014 (Wikipedia).

Benjamin J. Abraham provides a method of interrupting, if only momentarily, the button pushing, effacing effects of climate impact that the player engages in when they play environmental storytelling games, such as *The Last of Us*. While Abraham notes that "On a moment-to-moment level, games may succeed or fail at representing or simulating an 'ecological' or ecocritical situation or event," they can also prompt moments of "ecological thought" whereby the player is reminded that they are "an organism, in an environment." According to Abraham, the ways in which a video game can precipitate ecological thought is by reminding them of the gaming system itself and/or the external environment existing outside the gaming world. In *The Last of Us*, this manifests most prominently in the use of flashlights. Occasionally, as the player explores dark spaces in the game, their flashlight will flicker and an icon—a sight-image signifier—depicting a tilted game controller with two circles around the base of one shell tip appears (see fig. 38). In these moments, the player is prompted to tap their controller, typically in the palm of their hand, to recharge their flashlight. After doing so, the player's flashlight brightens again, and the player returns to regular gameplay. In this manner, gameplay seems to be interrupted, but really, the video game is extending gameplay outside the virtual world temporarily to provide the player with the chance to engage in ecological thinking—to recognize their controller and themselves as an extension of the environment in the video game. The fact that the icon that appears on the screen is a virtual rendering of the very controller the player holds in their hands both disrupts gameplay but also cements the player as an extension of the environment in the video game, similar to the lichenthropy of character bodies as well as the fungal zombies.

Figure 38: The icon depicting a tilted game controller from *The Last of Us*, 2013.

Ultimately, what the emergence of a lichenthropy in the Chthulucene evokes is the increasing anxiety of the categorical human. The Gothic already "highlight[s] the instability and ultimate unsustainability of our most basic ontological category – the human – along with the essential ethical and epistemological paradigms we derive from it" (Heise-von der Lippe 218). To illustrate this point, I turn to Renata Tyszczuk, who explains that climate

change is “too here, too there, too everywhere, too weird, too much, too big, too everything” to really understand, encapsulate, and approach (47), and this is why the Chthulucene becomes the most efficient means through which to engage it. In *The Last of Us*, the infected are, quite literally, everywhere and a part of everything in the video game world. One cannot explore a building or even a room without being reminded of the environment, which is usually locked out of human dwellings in the Anthropocene. The separation of human and environment is part of what maintains the ontological category that is the human, but the constant reminder of the environment in *The Last of Us* ensures that the human category remains unstable and always at risk of becoming fungus. The source of dread lies, though, not merely in disrupting and questioning this ontological category but also in what humans become through this very disruption (Heise-von der Lippe 220). While *The Last of Us*, for example, suggests that bodies of contagion are intertwined with the environment in various lichenthropic ways, it also represents “an equally important connection to technology and the virtual” (Chang 58).

But, to complicate the instability of ontological categories even further, the environmental possibilities in the ecoGothic video game are merely ecological simulacra, and continuing to engage in them, as noted above, means that the environment is damaged in the quest to become closer to a virtual nature. The suggestion then becomes that any attempts at progressive environmental storytelling will unfortunately fail. For instance, Alenda Chang believes that “More environmentally realistic games could affect our understanding of real-world environmental issues, either by implicitly or explicitly modeling different forms of our individual and collective environmental agency” (60), and indeed, *The Last of Us* seems to accomplish this. However, participating in the methods (gaming) for developing better environmental understanding negatively impacts the environment; thus, players can either destroy the environment to affect change that could possibly save the environment or can leave the environment be and risk never developing a necessary framework for affecting change and thereby continue destroying the environment. The question then becomes, to play or not to play?

The Game Changer: Let Fungi be Fungi

As I pen this chapter, *The Last of Us* has been adapted and recently aired on television—a decade after the initial release of the video game. The pilot episode opens with a scene not depicted in the video game. A flashback reveals two epidemiologists who appear on a television show in 1968—the same year that Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* was released ("When You're Lost in the Darkness"). The host asks them which form of pathogen, such as bacteria, virus, and fungus, keeps them up at night ("When You're Lost"). One claims that for him it is the fungus to which the live audience in the room begins to laugh ("When You're Lost"). The epidemiologist acknowledges this to be an expected reaction and responds, "fungi seem harmless enough; many species know otherwise because there are some fungi who seek not to kill but to control […] viruses can make us ill, but fungi can alter our very minds" ("When You're Lost"). He goes on to explain the physiology behind how the *Ophiocordyceps* fungus creates the "zombie ant": "the fungus needs food to live, so it begins to devour its host from within, replacing the ant's flesh with its own" ("When You're Lost"). The other epidemiologist intrudes on the first's monologue, pointing out that a "fungal infection of this kind is real but not in humans" to which the second agrees, but clarifies why this is:

> Fungi cannot survive if its host's internal temperature is over 94 degrees and currently there are no reasons for fungi to evolve to be able to withstand higher temperatures, but what if that were to change? What if, for instance, the world were to get slightly warmer? Well, now, there is reason to evolve. One gene mutates and an *Ascomycota Candida, Ergot, Cordyceps, Aspergillus*, any one of them could become capable of burrowing into our brains and taking control not of millions of us but billions of us. Billions of puppets with poisoned minds permanently fixed on one unifying goal, to spread the infection to every last human alive by any means necessary. There are no treatments for this, no preventatives, no cures; they don't exist; it's not even possible to make them. ("When You're Lost")

The epidemiologist's statement, meant to be a foreshadowing explanation of how *Cordyceps* mutated to infect humans decades later in *The Last of Us*, gestures toward the effects of

climate change. Meanwhile, as he speaks, the audience members stare fixedly at him on stage, consuming everything he says and reflecting the silent majority that influenced, in part, the zombies in Romero's film, which I discuss in Chapter 2. After a moment of silence, the host aptly states, "we'll be back" ("When You're Lost"). The host's statement is dualistic; it is the usual statement made by television hosts when a show cuts to commercial, but it also engenders the properties of the zombie—that which comes back from the dead. Whereas the television adaptation is quite authentic to the original video game, making few changes, the ones that it does make reflect more readily the current lichen/thropy of the fungus/human relationship, thereby shifting the zombie of the twenty-first century out of the Anthropocene and into the Chthulucene, furthering the rise of the rhizombie.

For instance, there have been a series of post-COVID fungal outbreaks around the world. While the first cases of *Candida Auris*, a "fungal superbug," emerged in 2009 in Japan and 2016 in the United States, they tripled in the latter region between 2019-2021 (Drummond). Most likely the proliferation and more immediate and deadly threat of COVID-19 overshadowed any news about *Candida Auris* and other, possibly deadly, fungal infections. In fact, Joe Wallen and Sarah Newey argue that the attention paid to COVID-19 homogenized resources and medical research in a manner that possibly increased the transmissibility and threat of fungal infections, which is why the rhizomatic approach is so crucial now. *Candida Auris* is spreading rapidly because it is resistant to most anti-fungal drugs, which the epidemiologist in *The Last of Us* pilot episode highlights as a reason why fungi are a greater threat than viruses or bacteria and, unlike other yeast-based fungal infections, *Candida Auris* does not grow exclusively within the body but "colonises" the skin (Drummond). Again, the epidemiologist echoes this kind of behaviour in his description of the "zombie ant" when he states that the fungus "replac[es] the ant's skin." Most fungal infections do not result in contagion level outbreaks because they are not passed

Figure 39: The player wrestles with a clicker in *The Last of Us*, 2013.

from person to person, but *Candida Auris* is different; as it functions by continuously colonising and shedding surfaces, it can therefore contaminate multiple spaces within an environment (Borman and Johnson 1) similar to the *Cordyceps* fungus in *The Last of Us*. In this manner, the surface, via colonization, is made monstrous. Moreover, the term "colonise" is further employed in epidemiology by separating the infected from the "colonised" whereby the "colonised" are carriers of the fungus but have not yet exhibited signs of infection (Lovett).

Candida Auris is not the only fungal outbreak plaguing our world at the moment. In 2021, India experienced a "black fungus" a.k.a. a *Mucormycosis* epidemic resulting in approximately 45,000 cases and 4,500 deaths (Wallen and Newey). Like the "clickers"—one of the zombie mutations in the video game—or the *Cordyceps* infecting Ellie's brain, *Mucormycosis* infects the sinuses, lungs, and brain (Newey), resulting in some victims having to have their eyes removed to prevent its spread (Barber). While tragic, this further mirrors the "clickers" in *The Last of Us* that have no eyes as a result of long exposure to *Cordyceps* (see fig. 39). *Mucormycosis* spreads via contact with the fungal spores sprouting from decaying matter (Newey)—so, essentially, like the final stage of the zombies in *The Last of Us* video game,[80] which sprout, filling the Gothic hallways with spores that, if inhaled, result in infection. *Aspergillus*—one of the fungi mentioned by the epidemiologist in *The Last of Us* adaptation—causes *Aspergillosis*, which is a chronic condition that people have been living with for over a decade already (Barber) as kinds of "colonisers." Additionally, a plant mycologist in Kolkata, India is patient zero for a fungus called *Chondrostereum Purpureum* (Wallen and Newey). After two months of taking anti-fungal medications, the patient has recovered, but medical experts are now concerned because "it was not previously thought that fungal spores in plants could infect human beings" (Wallen and Newey). Even Wallen and Newey cannot resist noting parallels between *Chondrostereum Purpureum* and *The Last of Us*, highlighting how the fungal case curiously emerged when *The Last of Us* aired on HBO. Thus, in a world that seems to be increasingly overrun with contagion, any and every possible pathogen could arise as the next pandemic; this is precisely why a rhizombie framework best encapsulates the current epoch.

[80] The television adaptation did not include spores as a possible point of infection.

Nowhere is this more evident than in *Mycetoma*—a "'real life Last of Us' infection" (Wallen and Newey). *Mycetoma* "is spread by the thorn prick from an acacia tree" (Wallen and Newey). This manner of transmission bespeaks the spread of the zombie pathogen in most contemporary zombie narratives: a thorn functions similar to a tooth in its ability to break the skin, yet it also represents possible connections and transmissions between plants and humans. Similarly, another quality that *The Last of Us* television adaptation introduces, and which is not in the video game, is the seemingly infinite interconnectivity of the fungus. In one scene from episode two, Joel shoots a newly infected; afterward, the camera zooms in on the hand of the dead infected where tendrils wrap around its fingers ("Infected"). The camera suddenly switches to the hand of what appears to be an older dormant infected, signified by the somewhat blackened and dirty skin, where tendrils also reach up and enwrap its fingers (see fig. 40; "Infected"). The dormant infected begins to flex and extend its fingers, so the pathogen functions like a rhizome connecting two infected bodies in different places and who were infected at different times. The latter zombie rises up and joins a horde of zombies running toward the building where Joel, Tess, and Ellie are hiding ("Infected"). The fungus in this moment has enmeshed both the new dead and old dormant infected into its infinite tentacularity. Earlier in this episode, Ellie observes that the infected are "connected" when witnessing a group of them move in unison when exposed to the sun, flipping over to possibly absorb sunlight ("Infected"), an essential ingredient in photosynthesis, which is part of the process that feeds the photobiont, or fungal portion, of lichen. Tess explains that "the fungus also grows underground—long fibers like wires stretching over a mile" ("Infected"). She goes on to explain that stepping on a patch of *Cordyceps* can awaken infected from nearby areas ("Infected"). The episode ends with an infected Tess sacrificing herself to give Joel and Ellie a chance to escape. However, what is really significant in this episode, especially in terms of the interconnectivity of the fungus, is

Figure 40: Tendrils wrap around a dormant zombie in *The Last of Us* episode 1.2, 2023.

that the infected do not attack Tess when they find her. Instead, one infected approaches and reaches its tendrils inside her mouth to presumably connect with the fungus already spreading through her body ("Infected"). In this manner, Tess is not yet an example of the infected but is one of the "colonised" that becomes intertwined with the fungal framework.

Interestingly, what each of the health experts in the real-world scenarios seem to agree on is that fungal-based pathogens are a "global health threat" (Lovett), so even as they insist that fungal-based pathogens will not reach "pandemic" status because they rarely spread from person to person (Newey), they each draw on the language of globalization, suggesting that there is the possibility of a pandemic. As a result, fungal-based pathogens are now becoming more of a priority for infectious disease control: the World Health Organization (WHO) has issued pleas to medical research facilities to prioritize research on fungal infections because at the moment only 1.5 percent of funding is dedicated to fungi, and the issue is most likely going to continue to grow (Barber), so to speak. The WHO admits that the risk of fungus-based pathogens is growing due to a mix of "Covid, mounting resistance to drugs and an increase of immunocompromised patients" (Barber). The WHO unfortunately neglects to mention climate change, which is one of the most important "causes" of this increase, but that is because the WHO operates within the Anthropocene, resisting collapsing the Anthropos into the environment. Consequently, the media continues to fail to note that contagion and climate change are entangled. Like emergent game designers, the WHO relegates the environment into the background even as the "background" evolves to prove itself not to be pre-set or predetermined or necessarily separate from the body of the human.

What makes the zombie of *The Last of Us* so powerful and potent a figure is that it is becoming increasingly believable, especially in the age of contagion and climate change. Scientists originally believed that a fungus could not infect humans; nevertheless, fungi outbreaks are occurring more frequently, transforming human bodies into markers of the entanglement of contagion and climate change. Not only has the outbreak of *Chondrostereum Purpureum* revealed that current understandings of how fungi functions are indeed limited, but it highlights how desires to control the environment and relegate it to a static, finite form of existence—as a controlled element—will ultimately lead to human demise. Like "let water be water," which demonstrates a disconnect from the environment,

reducing water to a set of "plausible" and pre-set codes and relegating it to the background in the video game, fungi have been able to let lie for far too long, and this is precisely why it has arisen in recent zombie narratives, such as *The Last of Us*. By limiting player possibility space and reducing emergent gameplay—markers of the Anthropocene—more realistic environmental storytelling and the player's possibility space within it can materialize and shift the player into Morton's proposed ecological thinking. The television adaptation is not reliant upon emergence or possibility space, which is why its most likely better able to reflect current fears regarding the plausibility of fungal outbreaks in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion – Going Green

To rectify its impact on the environment, *The Last of Us*, I have argued, presents a narrative of interconnectedness, a narrative of lichenthropy in the Chthulucene. Haraway believes that "only with intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that include people will be possible"; thus, the Chthulucene emerges (*Staying* 101). By playing *The Last of Us*, a player explores relations to "other terrans," but the perceived possibility spaces undermine the process of exploration so that the "rich multispecies" are always already infected. The fact that the *Cordyceps* fungus in the body of the zombie produces fear of its tentacularity and richness of assemblages means that the beautifully sublime aspects of the greenery growing throughout the game are rendered dangerous as well. Bishop, however, suggests that "the optimism manifested by the story's focus on finding a cure reflects a more positive worldview that threats such as the War on Terror, new pandemic infections, or even global climate change *can* be addressed, beaten back, and overcome" (*How Zombies* 140). Bishop's point reveals what ecoGothic video games *can* do, but not how this idea is consistently undermined through the myth of possibility space. At the final standoff in the first video game, for instance, to shoot Marlene is to be culpable in the continuation of the fungus, the post-apocalypse, and the Chthulucene. Not to shoot Marlene is to be culpable in developing a vaccine and potentially saving the human species, which would lead to an undoing of the Chthulucene and a loss of the potential for rectifying of the environmental crises. The player has mere moments to consider this decision before the game steals the player's supposed

agency and switches to a cutscene where Joel shoots Marlene. The player cannot be left to make this decision on their own, cannot be allowed to choose to let Marlene live, because to do so would be to suggest that America can engage in environmental change without interference. Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow states that "we are the future, or, at any rate, a future," suggesting that there are many possible futures and there is a response-ability in ecoGothic to construct the "right" future in much the same way that video games condition the player. The real horror of the ecoGothic video game is not the monstrous Gaia unfurling and destroying the human species but realizing that the perceived possibility of enacting change is revealed to be a myth.

It may appear as if video gaming presents a way of playing out the end of the world again and again to get it right, but video games limit possibility space to reveal how American individualist ideology means that those interpellated by such an ideology cannot be responsible for making ecologically progressive choices, especially in the Anthropocene. But perhaps it is possible to be response-able in the Chthulucene. Returning to the possibility space from the beginning of the game, if Joel does not shoot the trapped survivor, he still finds and collects two extra bullets, but the trapped survivor yells for mercy as Joel moves along the next hallway. The roof caves in, and the way back to the trapped survivor is forever blocked, thereby narrowing the possibility space even further and forcing Joel to move on knowing that the trapped survivor will slowly suffer and turn into a zombie; the trapped survivor will, over time, become part of the Gothic hallways of the abandoned Boston underground, transforming and terraforming those spaces with its spores. It is in this moment that the player realizes they have not pressed a button.

Haraway notes that "human beings are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, with all other beings simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story" (*Staying* 55). In fact, humans and zombies alike in *The Last of Us* are both PCs and NPCs. In *The Last of Us II*, for example, when the player witnesses Joel's death, they are both PC and NPC because directly before this moment, they have played as both Abby and Ellie on simultaneous timelines, culminating in the room and the moment when Joel is killed. Thus, the player identifies as both the PC and NPC in this moment. Haraway's purposeful use of the term "knitted" adds itself to my lengthening list of images of the interconnectedness that

characterizes the rhizombie. When zombies in *The Last of Us* attach to the surfaces of buildings and erupt, spores are released in the hopes of infecting more humans and the transition of the human to lichen is complete—a lichenthropy. To appropriate Haraway's terminology, "human beings are [finally] with and of the earth" (*Staying* 55). The fact that *The Last of Us* never allows the player to complete the transformation of zombie-fungus-environment reveals how American ecoGothic continues to resist the narrative of solving climate change, refusing to acknowledge it, but the rhizombie mitigates this denial. Morton notes that "ecological awareness is that moment at which these narrators find out that they are the tragic criminal" (*Dark Ecology* 9). In *The Last of Us*, this awareness is also the moment when the player realizes that they are and are not part of the Chthulucene, the moment when the player is always already infected, the moment when the player has pushed a button or turned a key, the moment when the player embraces the rhizombie, and the moment when the player is responsible rather than response-able. To resist infection, like the infected survivor in the Boston underground, is to resist becoming part of the Chthulucene, to literally resist going green.

CHAPTER 5

Endemic:
Endlings and Embracing Extinction

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light
(Dylan Thomas)

With its birdsong, buzzing bees,
and gently swaying grasses in the winds,
watching a film that anticipates the rewilded, ruined world
after humanity has perished
is akin to doing a mindfulness exercise.
(Caroline Edwards, qtd. in Canavan et al.)

In the final scenes of *Peninsula* (2020), the sequel to the Korean zombie film *Train to Busan* (2016), a group of survivors are rescued and transported from the zombie-infested Korean peninsula to a zombie-free Hong Kong. Jooni, who is one of the young protagonists rescued at the end of the film, spent her formative years living through the zombie epidemic that affects the Korean peninsula. She replies to the idea that she's "going to a better place" by admitting, "this place wasn't bad either" (*Peninsula*). Jooni's response points toward a shift in zombie narratives that have emerged since the 2019 spread of COVID-19: an eschewing of survival discourse that has dominated most previous contagion narratives, including many of the narratives I discuss in the previous three chapters. Instead, the zombie narratives I address in this chapter adopt a discourse that is indicative of an endemic. For instance, the unnamed speaker who promises "a better place" in *Peninsula* represents the dominant survival discourse of zombie narratives, envisioning a world that is pre-zombie or a return to a *status quo*—it must be "better." In contrast and despite spending years living in a zombie infested region, Jooni's response—"this place wasn't bad either"—represents the endemic. Endemic narratives generally take place several years after a zombie outbreak when zombies are constantly present within a particular geographic region, and as such, they acknowledge that existing within an infected space is not necessarily a bad thing; not all survivors within infected spaces desire "a better place."

Narratives that focus on the endemic zombie are still a relatively new offshoot of the rhizombie, but they are growing in popularity. In addition to *Peninsula,* some of these narratives include *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* trilogy (2009-2011), *In the Flesh* (2013-14), *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014; 2016),[81] and Mira Grant's *Newsflesh* series (2010-2016),[82] each of which take up elements of the endemic; however, after examining some other zombie fictions that precede it, this chapter focuses primarily on *The Walking Dead: World Beyond* (2020-21), which can be read in the "post-COVID" context.[83] In the case of this chapter, I am using "post-COVID" to refer to the ways in which COVID has altered—possibly permanently—the representation of our relationships to contagion, past and present. This is not to state that COVID is over, but that contagion narratives—either on the part of the creator or through cultural analysis—are now always already fraught with the influence of firsthand pandemic experience. As such, they are implicated in the rhizombie and affect the narratives I have addressed in the previous chapters as well. This chapter argues that living with contagion requires reaching the endemic, but how can this be accomplished? The endemic is characterized by entanglements between contagion, climate change, and the *status quo* in the rhizombie, and more specifically, by looking at how zombie narratives are beginning to embrace extinction, which is a concept put forth by Sarah E. McFarland. McFarland implores "creative writers for *more* literature, more novels, stories, poems, and essays that recognize the entanglement of humans within the mass extinction events happening around the world" ("Embracing Extinction" 838). While the characters in the narratives from Chapter 2, 3, and 4 avoid acknowledging their predicaments as extinction stories, this chapter focuses solely on stories about extinction. McFarland notes that what is "Important to this shift [for more literature about entangled extinction] is an acknowledgement of shared vulnerability, an emphatic empathy" ("Embracing Extinction"

[81] The 2014 version refers to the novel while the 2016 version refers to the filmic adaptation of the novel.

[82] Mira Grant is the penname of Seanan McGuire. The series consists of *Feed* (2010), *Deadline* (2011), *Blackout* (2012), *Rise* (2016), and *Feedback* (2016) as well as a series of short stories that were strictly released online.

[83] "Post-COVID" is a bit of a misnomer, suggesting something that comes after COVID and presuming that COVID is no longer around, but that is not necessarily the case. While the definition of "post-" refers to something that temporally comes after (*OED*), this does not mean the root term is over, so it can be addressed in terms of something influenced by the root term and is consistently wrapped up with its root term, such as post-colonial or post-modern.

838). This chapter takes up McFarland's call in two ways: first, by addressing the kinds of zombie narratives that McFarland petitions writers to create, those that engage explicitly with the human species going extinct; and second, by "recogniz[ing] the entanglement of humans within the mass extinction events happening." I argue that embracing extinction calls for rejecting Manifest Destiny and the hope imperative, dismantling the construction of the Child, and shifting discourse toward a multispecies approach that views the dead (or undead) as equally deserving of space. Ultimately, in post-COVID zombie narratives, fully realised endemicity means moving beyond the *status quo*, thus providing a better framework for inclusive practices and environmental progress—issues being unveiled in the age of contagion and thus entangled together in the rhizombie.

Exordium: The End(emic) is Nigh

Mira Grant's *Feed* (2010) is an endemic zombie novel, but instead of learning to live alongside the infected, the characters "harden themselves into an ongoing apocalypse" (Halpin 32) because the series embodies post-9/11 anxieties, but also, despite being published a decade prior to COVID, eerily also reflects post-COVID fears. The first novel in Grant's *Newsflesh* series takes place between 2039 and 2040, twenty-six years after the initial "Rising" (Grant 130), and follows a group of bloggers—Georgia, Shaun, and Georgette a.k.a. Buffy[84]—who are tasked with documenting the campaign of a presidential candidate across zombie-infested California. The group run the aptly named news site, *After the End Times*. Grant's zombieverse is characterized by battling the infodemic, constant quarantine, daily viral testing, and debates about animal rights and childcare. Jenni G. Halpin calls this "post-apocalyptic restructuring" (32), but the degree to which the characters attempt to separate themselves from the virus and any non-human bodies with the potential to "spontaneously amplify" is reminiscent of the early COVID-19 government mandates, such as quarantine, limited travel, social distancing, and regular testing. According to Halpin, more than sickness, the zombie pathogen in *Feed* "produce[s] such fear that the human hosts

[84] George and variations of the name are prominent in Grant's world because George A. Romero—the father of the modern zombie—is considered a hero. It turns out that the rules for how to kill a zombie in his *Living Dead* franchise work in Grant's world, so he's "one of the accidental saviors of the human race" (Grant 28).

prophylactically deny themselves life" (34). Fear is a constant theme in the novel: Georgia admits, "From blood tests to gated communities, we have embraced the cult of fear" (186). But the "cult of fear" in *Feed* is reduced to a single motive: to avoid the spread of Kellis-Amberlee, the name of the virus responsible for zombies. As such, Grant's zombieverse sacrifices children (who can spontaneously amplify as their bodies change with age) mammals over forty pounds, underprivileged (read: minority) communities, social relationships, and the ability to move freely outside one's home. This is because, like the characters in *The Walking Dead*, everybody in *Feed* is infected.

Characters in *Feed* have completely forgotten about systemic oppression and climate change, not merely maintaining the *status quo* but worsening circumstances for underprivileged groups and the environment. For example, Buffy is wealthy and lives in a gated community that even her friends have trouble entering. While her race is never revealed, the novel refers to her as "being the perkiest, blondest, outwardly flakiest member of the team" (Grant 22). Buffy is an upper-class, presumably white, Christian woman who has access to every possible security measure available in Grant's zombieverse. Despite Buffy's privilege, though, she cannot escape the pathogen, and in her dying words, she claims that the group to which she leaked information to would help "this country to be great again" (Grant 366), echoing the discourse that informs right-wing politics in America. Because safety is a signifier of privilege in the novel, those who cannot afford to live in gated communities are more likely to become infected. After all, Gerry Canavan notes that "in zombie narrative[s] the 'enemy' who is killed is always first the zombie—who is unthinking and unfeeling, and can be killed without regret—as the story proceeds the violence inevitably spreads to other, still-alive humans as well" (444-45). He goes on to point out how "Anyone outside the white patriarchal community, anyone who is not already one of 'us,' is a potential threat to the future who must be interrogated intensely, if not kept out altogether" (Canavan 445).[85] The dearth of non-white characters in the novel represents ongoing racial disparities in America. Similarly, Dein believes that "The Covid [*sic*] crisis is revealing health care inequalities, class divisions, unequal distribution of power, and the fact that the most important workers in American society are among the least paid […] the crisis has exposed the structural disadvantage and discrimination faced by parts of the black, Asian and minority

[85] See, Chapter 2.

ethnic communities" (12). Dein concludes that health inequities during contagion reveal how "new forms of bio power have arisen" (13), including necropower as part of the "postmorten virality" discussed in my Introduction. This is part of the quotidian for the survivors in *Feed* where, even after death, the CDC has the "right" to properly "deal with our remains" for the sake of preventing the spread of Kellis-Amberlee (Grant 400).

Animals and the environment also continue to be marked by the carelessness of humans. Any animal over forty pounds can be infected, so many survivors have abandoned pets, such as large dogs and horses, while wildlife, such as deer and moose, are not considered valuable parts of the ecosystem, although, they are no longer hunted because their bodies are tainted meat (Grant 29). The San Diego Zoo, for instance, was bombed by "activists" trying to wipe out any animal that can spread the pathogen; Georgia points out that, while these "activists" call themselves "pro-life," they are really "pro-genocide" (Grant 103). The discourse of "pro-life" reflects the Alt-Right, anti-abortion agenda,[86] suggesting that it functions within the larger discourse of the "culture of fear." Shaun later explains the process by which the government deals with an infected environment: "Sterilization is horrific. You burn any vegetation the zombie came into contact with, and if they walked on any open ground, you drench it with a solution of chlorinated saline. If it's a rural or suburban area, you kill any animals you find" (Grant 156). Humans are not subject to the same strict approaches even though their bodies are part of "postmortem virality." So, while humans may not drive or fly as often, and thus are cutting carbon emissions, they devalue non-human life more and more.

The survivors in Grant's zombieverse rarely leave their homes because when they do, they must pass several blood tests. As such, they seem to operate within a constant quarantine. Manel Herat, citing B. Rimé et al., points out that "during traumatic situations such as natural disasters and pandemics, people process the trauma of the situation by coming together." Unfortunately, this was not physically possible during COVID-19 where social distancing and lockdowns became the primary means of reducing the spread of the disease, nor for the characters in the *Newsflesh* zombieverse. A rapid review by Samantha K. Brooks et al. concludes that extended periods of quarantine result in "post-traumatic stress symptoms, confusion, and anger. Stressors included longer quarantine duration, infection

[86] Access to abortion in the United States was banned in 2022 when *Roe v. Wade* was overturned (Hausman).

fears, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, financial loss, and stigma" (912). To mitigate these stressors, Brooks et al. argue that quarantines should be as short as possible (917-18) and that governments as well as the media should appeal to people's "altruism" (919). The survivors in Grant's zombieverse are clearly living in a "culture of fear" perpetuated and reinforced by strict government regulations, such as long term, ongoing quarantine. What the *Newsflesh* series suggests is that any issue (zombies, terrorism, COVID), regardless of how big or small, becomes part of the quotidian and is overlaid by its contagious qualities as well as the governmental response to it. The threat of contagion then overshadows any threat of climate crisis or racial oppression. The rhizombie unveils how the threat is never as threatening as what Halpin calls "security theatre," which is employed by the governmental organizations in *Feed* (41).

According to Halpin, "security theatre" is the performance of safety, which oftentimes functions in lieu of actual safety (41). In *Feed*, all infrastructure is dedicated to increasing separation under the guise of safety (Halpin 43). This performance renders the survivors in the *Newsflesh* series helpless and suggests that there will always be someone or something that will save them. The series, while endemic, uses "security theatre" to maintain American narratives of Manifest Destiny. Because Manifest Destiny dictates a constant movement, it can be constructed by those in power to make their citizens forget that they are in constant quarantine. The fact that the novel is set in California is one way in which the first novel, *Feed*, accomplishes Manifest Destiny. "Manifest Destiny" was first coined in 1845 by John O'Sullivan and refers to "the advance of American settlement westward" and is therefore an imperialist notion (Turner 199). However, Manifest Destiny did not end once the continent was "conquered," but became interwoven in American narratives. In his Frontier thesis, Frederick J. Turner avers, "This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward [read: California] with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces of dominating American character" (200). For example, during the Great Depression (1929-39), families packed up and headed *en masse* to California in what is considered to be the largest movement of white Americans in history in hopes of reaping some sort of wealth from the riches the state promised (Askew 74). Unsurprisingly, challenges posed by the COVID pandemic recall Manifest Destiny into being. Dwayne Trevor Donald argues, "An important aspect of this mindset of 'Manifest

Destiny' is the way in which the individual was seen as playing a vital role in the creation of a new civilization" (44-45). In the case of *Feed*, the survivor staying in quarantine maintains this "new civilization" by protecting what they have already established in California. The zombies roaming the Californian landscape outside the quarantine zones become a constantly moving frontier that is always pushing to come inside. Halpin calls George and Shaun's house "a safety-ensuring interstitial space, one step away from the dangers of the outdoors but still protecting the indoors from what might be dangerous" (44). In essence, Manifest Destiny and the "culture of fear" are interconnected and are wielded by government organizations in the novel to maintain power over the people.

Ironically, while disease calls Manifest Destiny into being, it can also be its terminus. During the mid-1800s American expansion into the West, driven by Manifest Destiny, reached an apex of violence via disease against Indigenous nations (Petriello 138) as I briefly discussed in Chapter 3. Between 1829 and 1832, 80-90% of the Indigenous inhabitants of what is now called Oregon were wiped out by Malaria brought in on the *Owhyhee* ship, commanded by Captain John Dominis (Petriello 138-9). Many of the remaining Indigenous people fled south to California, bringing the disease with them, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 70,000 Californian Natives (Petriello 139). Another 80,000 Californian Natives were wiped out by cholera and other diseases during the California Gold Rush a decade later (Petriello 148). These are just a few examples of the crushing impact of foreign diseases killing the Indigenous nations of Turtle Island. While there were other factors resulting in the deaths of Indigenous populations (and settlers), "none killed more than disease" (Petriello 147). With the rapid reduction of Indigenous nations, American settlements were established much faster; David Petriello elucidates, "A more populated and determined Native presence would have certainly hindered American occupation and eventual acquisition of Oregon [and California, I might add], yet malaria prevented this" (139).[87] While Manifest Destiny did not end *per se* in this example, it seemed to no longer be needed and therefore has not been called upon as often once the West was "conquered." Manifest Destiny and disease are therefore intimately connected.

[87] While Petriello's point here largely seems to be measured by how quickly American occupation took place, it is ultimately impossible to prove just how "determined" a population undergoing genocidal violence is; therefore, I disagree with this part of Petriello's argument.

Manifest Destiny is also entangled with a hopeful imperative—a drive, so to speak, to create a better world than the one in which the characters in the novel currently reside. However, this becomes an illusion; I have argued elsewhere that "Hope is [also] a large part of what drives our individualist, survivalist frameworks and therefore stands in the way of developing the necessary empathetic intelligence that is part of embracing extinction" ("Embracing Extinction (or at least Zombies)")—that is, essentially, part of the endemic. While hope is part of outbreak, epidemic, and pandemic narratives, it must be eschewed before endemicity can be realised. McFarland believes, "Speculations of human extinction may provide empathetic intelligibility about the complexity of the climate crisis that is otherwise incomprehensible, engaging a sense of loss, personal precarity, and emphatic empathy" (840). Therefore, the hopeful imperative to create stories with happy endings "is detrimental in its idealism. It means we resist acknowledging that we may be part of a mass extinction event—we hope our eventual extinction is not true. Therefore, we neglect to focus on our current impacts on the environment, which consequently might mitigate our eventual extinction. We hope too much and therefore neglect to take into consideration the benefits of embracing extinction" (Collier-Jarvis "Embracing Extinction (or at least Zombies)"). The manner in which the human survivors treat animals and the environment in the *Newsflesh* series is tantamount to making this error over and over. According to Ernst Bloch's "principle of hope," "Dying is pushed away, not because we enjoy life so much nor because somewhere we would gladly see or cause others to see into something coming," but because hope has thus moved away from death's eventuality (1105). Therefore, in the case of this chapter, I am drawing on the concept of hope as a utopic vision and narrative strategy (similar to Manifest Destiny) that is called into being to maintain a *status quo*; Lauren Berlant, citing Anna Potamianou's work on borderline patients, sees "hope as a stuckness within a relation to futurity that constitutes a problematic defense against the present" (13). Hope, then, is not about moving toward futurity so much as it is about policing the present based on the premise that things exist in a stasis that should (hopefully) continue as is so long as nothing changes.[88] Therefore, to embrace extinction, narratives must resist futurity-based,

[88] While Lauren Berlant notes how her concept of "optimism" is not so different from some approaches to hope, such as Ghassan Hage's approach outlined in *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (14), what she calls "cruel optimism" operates "as a relation of attachments to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is

utopic visions of hope and its imperatives for happy endings and Manifest Destiny.[89] The governmental regulations in the *Newsflesh* series are about policing a stasis that becomes normalized. Wald argues, "The lesson of the pandemic should teach us that 'normal' is what got us here," and as such, we should not return to "normal," new or otherwise (xv). This is because "normal"—the *status quo*—is saturated with "Racism, resource exhaustion, global poverty, environmental devastation, climate change" (Wald xv). Endemicity provides anything other than "normal" the chance to move beyond the problems of the pre-pandemic world. Normalcy is therefore linked to survivalism, to Manifest Destiny, to hope, and the zombie narratives that adopt these concepts, such as *Feed,* seek a world where pre-pandemic problems continue to proliferate. Thinking endemically is a chance not to return to the normal.

Feed ends with Georgia becoming infected and realising that the way they have been living is not really living at all. In her dying words, she issues a plea to her followers: "Don't let them keep us frightened and hiding in our homes. Let us be what we were intended to be: human and free and able to make our own choices […] Rise up while you can" (Grant 518). Georgia's statement to "rise up" reveals how the survivors in the novel have been similar to the dead this entire time, and like the zombies, it is time for them to get up and leave their respective spaces of quarantine. While her call to action suggests a possible Manifest Destiny, the fact that she posits them as being like the zombies suggests a realisation that space could be shared with the undead—or that being like the undead is not such a bad thing. The novel thus ends with a call for embracing extinction.

Bishop argues that "zombie cinema is among the most culturally revealing and resonant fictions of the recent decade of unrest" (*American* 10). While Bishop's argument was largely in response to the unrest in the decade following 9/11, it is still relevant in narratives that have been produced since. Cultural anxieties are often evident within zombie narratives and, unlike contagion narratives that consistently overlay anxieties with contagion, zombie narratives "have all the more power to shock and terrify a population […and thus

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discovered either to be *im*possible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" (24). Thus, while hope and optimism are related, I would argue that "cruel optimism" operates more so as their anti-thesis.

[89] As I consider my proposition for a renunciation of utopic visions of hope, I am aware that both McFarland and I are ironically also drawing on a different kind of hopeful imperative, one that envisions an idealistic shift in ideology.

become] the most telling barometer of this modern age" (Bishop, *American* 11-12) so long as they are discussed within their rhizombific possibilities. Post-COVID zombies are not just monstrous embodiments; they have shifted to function within endemic-based concerns, such as living alongside contagion or eventually being superseded by contagion. As such, post-COVID zombie narratives are moving away from survival discourse, including its related concepts of hope, and in America, Manifest Destiny, that mark outbreak, epidemic, and pandemic zombie narratives and are instead adopting a discourse that responds to and represents endemicity.

Endemicity: Coming of Age in a World of Zombies

The word "endemic" has its origins with the Greek words *én* and *dēmos*, meaning "in the people" (Xue). It refers to something, such as a virus or disease or species, that is regularly found within a population, and more specifically, found within a specified geographic area. In terms of a virus or disease, Stephen Parodi of the American Medical Association asserts that an endemic "means that the disease is still around but that it's at a level that is not causing significant disruption in our daily lives" (qtd. in Zarefski). Rustom Antia and M. Elizabeth Halloran explain that "the endemic state refers to the stable maintenance of the pathogen, typically at a lower prevalence" (2172). For this to occur, "overall rates [must be] static—not rising, not falling. More precisely, it means that the proportion of people who can get sick balances out the 'basic reproduction number' [or R0 (naught)] of the virus, [which is] the number of individuals that an infected individual would infect, assuming a population in which everyone could get sick" (Katzourakis). Because this stasis occurs differently with each situation, there is no set threshold at which a pandemic becomes endemic (Parodi; qtd. in Zarefski), and endemic status is not an eventuality for all diseases. Thus, when I refer to the "endemic" in zombie narratives, I refer to narratives where the zombies are regularly present within a specified geographic region or community, such as the Korean peninsula in *Peninsula*, but the remaining human population is not often infected.

Endemic zombie narratives are characterized by temporal displacement from the initial outbreak and generally follow young characters, such as Jooni and the protagonists in *Feed*, many of which come of age amidst the epidemic and/or pandemic. Part of this is, of

course, due to the fact that many of these stories are young adult fiction. For example, Carrie Ryan's young adult trilogy—*The Forest of Hands and Teeth* (2009), *The Dead-Tossed Waves* (2010), and *The Dark and Hollow Places* (2011)—takes place many, many years after the zombie outbreak, and each novel follows a character coming of age within the zombie infested world. The 2009 novel follows protagonist Mary, who lives in a small village surrounded by fences, isolated deep in the woods (C. Ryan 2). The village is run by a group of nuns called the Sisterhood: "the driving force behind the village—the ones who created the Guardians [a kind of militia that guards the fences] and the reason we still exist" (C. Ryan 63). In Mary's world, when one becomes infected, they have a decision to make: they can be killed by the Guardians, or they can be released outside the fence to wander with the other "unconsecrated," the name given to the zombies in the novel. After a breach in the fence results in the village being overrun by zombies, Mary and a small group of other young survivors wander off through the forest seeking a new home (C. Ryan 278). Eventually, Mary leaves the group, searching for the ocean that her mother used to tell her stories about (C. Ryan 291). The novel ends with Mary successfully reaching the ocean (C. Ryan 308), obviously a representation of Manifest Destiny.

While *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* has potential in terms of an endemic zombie narrative, it ultimately returns to Manifest Destiny and hope; it refuses to embrace extinction. Initially, Mary rejects everything for which her village stands. She consistently questions the *status quo*. During one of these question sessions with Sister Tabitha, for example, Mary is told, "'We are the survivors.' She [Sister Tabitha] grabs my shoulders now, shakes me. 'We have to continue to survive. And I will allow nothing to jeopardize this'" (C. Ryan 64). Sister Tabitha's emphasis on "survival" is set in contrast to Mary's questioning of the *status quo*, allowing Mary to reflect upon life in a post-pandemic world. Sister Tabitha's violent response to Mary's questioning reveals how survivalism is predicated on maintaining order, on continuing to do things as they have always been done, on upholding the *status quo*, and on destroying anything that threatens that order. When Mary questions Sister Tabitha, she becomes a threat, and it is not until the breach that Mary is provided the opportunity to set out beyond the village fences in search of answers.

Bishop argues, "Ryan's works, particularly the first novel in her series, reveal how post-9/11 teenagers are struggling to choose between taking charge of their own uncertain

future and passively accepting peer pressure and an arrested adolescent development" (*How Zombies* 56). Mary questioning and leaving her village suggest she is doing the former. The fears manifested by 9/11, such as "the Millennial Generation's fear of isolation, false security, unreliable authority figures, invasion, infestation, destruction, and inevitable mortality—in addition to the adolescent reluctance to become a better adult" (Bishop, *How Zombies* 56), fears not so different from those that arose with COVID-19, can be overcome by rejecting the ideologies embodied by the Sisterhood and the Guardians in the novel. Mary can choose to move beyond her adolescent fears by rejecting the *status quo* of her village (and her peers), or she can accept them as part of growing up.

As the group journeys through the forest, encountering hunger, thirst, death, and disease, Mary begins to realise that what she searches for may not exist. She begins to doubt her resistance to the *status quo*, and in the final moments of the novel, she ultimately embraces it. In Mary's final narration, she reflects on the loss of her friends and family: "And then I remember Travis pulling me against him and telling me about hope" (C. Ryan 308). Travis was Mary's love interest before he succumbed to the zombie pathogen, and by ending the novel with this final reflection, Mary clings to hope as she stands at the edge of the ocean, dreaming about a better future as the dead unconsecrated are washed away by the tide (C. Ryan 308). The suggestion here turns out to be that coming-of-age—entering into adulthood—is marked by entering into the *status quo*. For example, Roderick McGillis asserts, "Adolescents are, perhaps, as intensely haunted or even more haunted than the rest of us. Their bodies as well as their social milieu are in flux, changing as they—both body and social group—morph (or should I say grow?) into maturity" (McGillis). As their body changes, the coming-of-age character is faced with whether they will physically and ideologically become one of the two groups they are surrounded by—the human group (parents/peers/authority figures) or the zombies—so entering into the *status quo* becomes the only option for such characters as Mary, who do not want to become a monster. Essentially, coming-of-age characters in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* must make a similar decision to that of the infected characters (to be "killed" by the Guardians or become unconsecrated). The question then becomes, how does one grow up while also embracing extinction?

The answer might be that one must never grow up at all, as in the case of Melanie in *The Girl with all the Gifts*. In contrast to Ryan's trilogy, M.R. Carey's 2014 novel, *The Girl*

with All the Gifts, and its 2016 film adaptation embrace extinction. Both the novel and the film take place in England twenty years after the zombie fungus (*Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*) has ravaged the Earth. Both the novel and the film follow Melanie, Miss Helen Justineau (a behavioural psychologist responsible for educating the child "hungries," the name given to the zombies), Dr. Caroline Caldwell (a scientist experimenting on the child "hungries" because she is obsessed with finding a cure), and two soldiers who escape the military base serving as their home when it is overrun by "hungries." In both texts, Melanie is a ten-year-old genius, who is part of a generation of infected children with cognitive abilities: they were infected whilst still in the womb, so with education, they can speak, read, and write, but they also still crave human flesh. In fact, whenever they smell human flesh, they temporarily become more monstrous than human, losing their cognitive faculties, so the remaining humans must constantly wear a scent blocker. With the help of Melanie, the surviving group traverse across a zombie-infested landscape in search of other survivors. However, upon discovering groups of children like Melanie, the characters are killed off until only Melanie and Miss Justineau remain.

The title, *The Girl with All the Gifts,* is an allusion to the story of Pandora, and in the film, the story of Pandora functions as an allegory for embracing extinction. The film adaptation opens with Miss Justineau telling the story: "she who brings gifts. Pandora opened up the box, whereupon every plague and tribulation, every misfortune and evil thing in the world came pouring out, and they have afflicted mankind ever since […] but then, Pandora peered into the box and found one more thing in the bottom—it was hope, and she lifted it into her hands, and she set it free" (*The Girl with All the Gifts*). The story of Pandora—and consequently, the beginning of *The Girl with All the Gifts*—is ultimately a story about hope. However, it turns out that hope is not necessary for humanity; instead, it is for Melanie and the other child "hungries," who have been locked up and experimented on by Dr. Caldwell, forcibly kept in quarantine for their entire existence. With the downfall of the military base, the child "hungries" are finally free. Therefore, while the story is about hope, it is a hope that favours the success of the pathogen—or rather, a human-pathogen being—over the future of the human survivors. After all, in the story of Pandora, the discovery of hope does not eliminate the plagues and tribulations, but rather, they co-exist.

The novel and the film ultimately both end the same way, with Miss Justineau realising that the child "hungries" are the future. The novel ends with Melanie, with the help of Sergeant Parks, setting fire to the fungus, releasing spores into the air, ensuring that the pathogen becomes airborne and secures the end of humanity; she thus leaves the world to the "hungries" (Carey 395). In the film, this role falls solely to Melanie. During Dr. Caldwell's final plea to Melanie to allow her to vivisect her brain in the attempt to find a cure, Melanie questions, "why should it be us who die for you?" (*The Girl*). Melanie's realisation that she owes nothing to the remaining humans results in her decision to release the spores that lead to the downfall of humanity. Regardless of which character(s) releases the spores, the story embraces extinction—it favours the future of the pathogen and the "hungries" over that of the humans. In a final conversation between Melanie and Sgt. Eddie Parks in the film, Melanie claims, "it's not over, it's just not yours anymore" (*The Girl*), revealing how the extinction of the human does not mean the end of the world; thus, the film seems to take an anti-anthropogenic, pro-zombific stance. The world does not end when the human species does. Were it not for the emphasis on education—a specifically Eurocentric education—in the final scene, *The Girl with all the Gifts* would be decidedly endemic in rejecting the *status quo*. Because the film ends with Miss Justineau standing behind a glass wall, educating the child "hungries," the film implies a return to a Eurocentric *status quo*. The film complicates endemicity's potential because the Eurocentric education revitalises pre-pandemic problems, such as colonialism and racism. Roger Davis argues that the classroom in *The Girl with all the Gifts* is one of the "firm ideological commitments to routine, normalcy, and the status quo" that maintains the freedoms of the liberal democratic state (19). Therefore, it becomes a signifier of the capacity of a pre-pandemic world.

The characters in *The Girl with All the Gifts* can never officially come of age. Unlike Mary in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, the child "hungries" will never be faced with the choice of upholding the *status quo* of their parents. The only thing they know is a world where the pathogen predominates.[90] Melanie is an exception; she is faced with the choice of saving the remaining humans whom she has protected throughout most of the film or

[90] The fact that the novel and film both end with the pathogen dominating, resulting in the near decimation of the human population, suggests that at the moment the narrative could potentially enter the endemic, it swings back into the pandemic.

releasing the spores and allowing the "hungries" to assert dominance. She chooses the latter, but she compromises on this choice by ensuring Miss Justineau's safety and maintaining the classroom structure. Melanie is therefore embracing human extinction but also upholding parts of the *status quo* because even though she does not come of age physically in the same manner that human characters do, she still experiences what Bishop calls "the post-9/11 generation's existential crisis and malaise" (*How Zombies* 62). For instance, in the opening classroom scene, Melanie tells a story that she created, which is set in Ancient Greece where a monster—"a friggin' abortion"—attacks a woman in the woods, and just when the monster is about to eat her, a girl intervenes and saves the woman (*The Girl*). Melanie's story is an obvious metaphor for her saving Miss Justineau, foreshadowing the end of the film, but it also establishes Melanie as rejecting identifying as the monster. While the phrase, "friggin' abortion," is typically used by the soldiers when they refer to the child "hungries," Melanie reclaims it here. Instead of being the "friggin' abortion" or playing the monster in the story, Melanie positions herself as the hero saving the damsel in distress.

In the end, Melanie does not come-of-age *per se,* but she does experience identity formation that results from her conversations with Dr. Caldwell. While hiding out in the halls of a medical facility, Melanie asks Dr. Caldwell, "what am I?" (*The Girl*), as opposed to "who am I." Whereas "who" addresses the identity of a person as subject, "what" poses a questioning of identity that is not limited to personhood, making space within Melanie's questioning for non-humans to better understand themselves. Consequently, Melanie seems to question her identity as both human and "hungry." Dr. Caldwell responds to Melanie's question, claiming that there is no name for it: "something else…neonates, newborns, infected and definitely 'hungries' but different from anything we've seen. They were still able to think, to interact with their environment. In many ways, they behaved like real people" (*The Girl*). Instead of categorizing Melanie as a single non-human noun, Dr. Caldwell constructs Melanie's identity as a plurality: as "neonates," "newborns," "infected," *and* "hungry." Essentially, Melanie is both a child and a "hungry"—a hybrid identity whose "humanness" is determined by her ability "to think, to interact with their environment," qualities critical to characters who are rhizombic. Ironically, Melanie's ability to do both of these things also determines her as non-human. In other words, her cognitive ability separates her from the humans in two ways: firstly, she knows herself as not entirely human because

she can question her identity in comparison to the humans;[91] secondly, she can think and communicate in a manner that separates her from the other "hungries." Therefore, Melanie's identity formation is made possible because she possesses "human" traits, such as a strong command of language, but employing these traits also results in her realisation that she is "something else." Because Melanie is transformed, but not necessarily destroyed, by the fungus, she is a representation of the endemic.

Dr. Caldwell goes on to note how "these children might have a partial immunity to the hungry pathogen" because they were "born" amidst the pandemic (*The Girl*). I have discussed immunity at length in the previous two chapters, concluding that immunity signifies both similarity and difference in multiple kinds of symbiosis and sympoiesis with other terrans. On the one hand, there must be a close enough biological constitution between those who are and are not immune for resistance to the pathogen to be called "immunity"; on the other hand, immunity ultimately suggests that the two—those who are immune and those who are not—are biologically different. In this case, Melanie can never be human, but this alone is potentially reductive, suggesting that what it means to be "human" exists solely at the biological level. Addressing Melanie's immunity through sympoiesis reveals that her immunity is a signifier of embracing extinction. Haraway argues, "to practice the arts of living and dying well in multispecies symbiosis, sympoiesis, and symanimagenesis on a damaged planet, must be made without guarantees or the expectation of harmony with those who are not oneself—and not safely other, either. Neither One nor Other" (*Staying* 98). Essentially, even though Haraway does not explicitly call for embracing extinction herself, her multispecies approach calls for embracing the risk of extinction—for playing out narratives of coexistence that might lead to human extinction. Melanie takes up this kind of call in *The Girl with All the Gifts*. Her identity transformation reveals an ability to be what Haraway calls "more attuned" (*Staying* 98) to both her human and "hungry" selves. Melanie is also "more able to practice the arts of living and dying well" with other species—a crucial quality of embracing extinction. For example, Melanie stays with both Dr. Caldwell and Sgt. Parks while they die. She also gathers the remaining child "hungries" together, so that both theirs and Miss Justineau's futures exist in a complex entanglement of sympoiesis. Melanie's immunity thus becomes a signifier for embracing extinction and reveals how "in the second

[91] Melanie is similar to Frankenstein's creation in this manner.

generation, your [Melanie's] generation, the fungus seems to function as a symbiote," as Dr. Caldwell notes.

Melanie's identity formation as "something else" is secured by Dr. Caldwell's plant metaphor: "let me know if you start to sprout" (*The Girl*). The term "sprout" has multiple definitions but is threefold in meaning. Firstly, it refers to new growth on a plant, such as a bud or shoot (*OED*).[92] Because the zombie pathogen in *The Girl with All the Gifts* is fungus, Dr. Caldwell's statement is a humorous acknowledgement of the part of Melanie that is non-human. Secondly, it refers to growing up (*Merriam-Webster*). Whereas the narrative is partly about Melanie's identity formation, when she "sprouts," she will finally be transitioning into "adulthood," and Dr. Caldwell's comment highlights how their journey is providing Melanie the opportunity to come of age. Thirdly, it refers to the ability "to bear, bring forth, or produce" (*OED*). Because Melanie initiates the downfall of humanity by releasing the spores, she is essentially the mother of the pathogen. Without her intervention, the fungus would not become airborne, so she "bears" or "produces" the future infected. Unlike the anti-futurity signified by a "friggin' abortion," Melanie's "sprouting" signifies a futurity entangled with contagion and the environment. In the end, these meanings overlap and are interconnected, and Melanie embodies all of them simultaneously as part of her identity formation.

During their conversation, Dr. Caldwell reveals that child "hungries" eat their way out of the womb, devouring their mothers in the process (*The Girl*). In response, Melanie, distraught at this news, claims, "I don't want to be a hungry" (*The Girl*). Melanie's horror comes from the fact that she essentially committed matricide. Matricide has been metaphorically woven into the zombie subgenre's themes of consumption and was one of the initial reasons why *Night of the Living Dead* shocked audiences when it first aired. In Romero's film, young Karen Cooper becomes infected during the initial zombie outbreak, and near the end of the film, she consumes her father and her mother, committing patricide and matricide (*Night*). Roger Ebert's initial response to the film notes, "This was ghouls eating people up—and you could actually see what they were eating. This was little girls killing their mothers." Similarly, Daniel Compora asserts that Karen "commits two social taboos in one act: matricide and cannibalism" (96). In terms of a child consuming the parent, matricide can be figured as a symbolic coming-of-age whereby one must consume the parent

[92] In Dr. Caldwell's initial statement, "sprout" is used as a verb, so this first definition is debateable.

before one can fully embody their position in the world. Maggie Kilgour argues that cannibalism and incest are analogous, but that they "threaten the normal distinctions and boundaries that define individual identity" (33). This form of consumption not only threatens the boundaries of the physical body, but it threatens the relations between mother and child whereby they both cease to be "mother" and "child" at the moment of consumption. Symbolically, matricide is a rejection of the *status quo* marked by the parent, so unlike Mary in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, Melanie and the other child "hungries" in *The Girl with All the Gifts* cannot return to the *status quo* when they consume their mothers. As such, child "hungries" can only come of age symbolically. Interestingly, matricide from within the womb is a kind of inversion of what it means to be "a friggin' abortion." Instead of the mother choosing to terminate her pregnancy, the infected fetus has terminated the pregnant woman's motherhood.

Despite the *status quo* marked by the classroom structure, endemicity is possible within *The Girl with all the Gifts* because it embraces extinction. Bishop explains how "Anna Jackson, Karen Coats, and Roderick McGillis argue that 'Rather than seeing the Gothic as an anomalous intrusion into their lives from some external and alien force, the children in many contemporary Gothic novels court their dark side, and own it as an aspect of the self'" (*How Zombies* 59). Nowhere is this more evident than in Melanie's final acceptance of her "hungry" identity when she releases the spores. Had Melanie been an immune, adult hungry, such an embracing of her "dark side" would not be possible; therefore, Melanie's identity formation amidst the zombie infestation is a crucial characteristic that makes zombie narratives, such as *The Girl with all the Gifts*, endemic. The coming-of-age characters in *The Walking Dead: World Beyond,* I now want to argue, grow up much as Melanie does, but ultimately, they embrace extinction by also "court[ing] their dark side."

Endling(s): Generation Z(ombie) and The Thylacine Era

The Walking Dead: World Beyond is a two-season spinoff of *The Walking Dead* television series. It takes place a decade after the initial zombie outbreak. It follows four young protagonists—Hope, Iris, Silas, and Elton—as they traverse across a zombie-infested American landscape in search of Hope and Iris' father: Dr. Bennett. Their father is a prominent scientist, who volunteered to go to a secret location to help engineer a possible cure to the zombie virus. Upon finding him, the group work together to expose the genocidal crimes of the Civic Republic Militia (CRM), the "governing" body. Hope, Iris, Silas, and Elton are the first generation to come of age within the zombie-infested world, and while all four protagonists experience life prior to and during "the night the sky fell" ("Brave"), as they call the time of the initial outbreak, they have spent their formative years in the zombie world—similar to Jooni in *Peninsula*.

The coming-of-age generation in *World Beyond* initially resists both survivalism and returning to a pre-pandemic kind of *status quo* in favour of embracing extinction. Mick Broderick claims that survival discourse "seemingly advocates" for a "symbolic order of the status quo"—a going back; he argues that it seeks to "annihilate the oppressive burdens of (post)modern life and usher in a nostalgically yearned-for less complex existence" (362). This is evident in many zombie narratives where survivors return to a state of pre-modernity after the outbreak. These are common in frontier zombie narratives or zombie Westerns, which I discuss in greater detail in the Conclusion. However, in these situations, "surviving" becomes primarily about building and guarding walls, similar to *Feed*, and generally adopting a "shoot first, ask questions later" attitude toward other groups of survivors. Moreover, science and technology in these narratives are often pre-industrial and representative of Manifest Destiny and the American frontier, and the characters consistently refer to themselves as "survivors," similar to those in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*. In contrast, endemic discourse in zombie narratives does not harken back but maintains a present approach. The endemic maintains (or re-establishes) post-industrialisation, partly to eschew the frontier that always seems to be waiting on the periphery, but partly to use post-industrial knowledge and technology for a potentially better future. For example, in *World Beyond*, there is

electricity, helicopters, modern medicine, and the young protagonists even attend the kind of school that is not so different from contemporary educational institutions. While there is talk throughout *World Beyond* of "going back," this language is relegated primarily to those who were already adults prior to "the night the sky fell" as well as representatives of the Civic Republic. Elizabeth Kublek, the representative for the Civic Republic, for example, highlights how its important they all invest in "the science that will bring this world back" ("Brave"). In both cases, those who embody the pre-pandemic world cannot accept the current world despite the presence of pre-pandemic infrastructure and are therefore constantly gesturing to a time before, chasing a mythological contagion-free past.

In fact, the desire for a pre-pandemic world drives the plot of the television show, and nowhere is this more apparent than in Hope's character. Season two opens with a brief conversation between Iris and Indira, the leader of the Periphery, a small town that is not part of the Civic Republic ("Konsekans"). Indira asks, "what do you live for?" and Iris says, "I guess I live for Hope" ("Konsekans"). Indira's response reveals the didactic meaning of Hope's name: "the world is nothing without hope" ("Konsekans"). The end of the first season reveals that Hope is "the asset," a genius whose intelligence is the key to developing a cure ("In This Life"). Unlike *The Girl with all the Gifts* or *The Last of Us* (see Chapter 4), which both posit that a cure must be engineered from the bodies of immune characters, *World Beyond* presents other scientific possibilities for ending the pandemic. However, the ends to which the Civic Republic go to find and bring Hope to their home colony are reflective of Sister Tabitha's violent response toward Mary in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*. The Civic Republic wipes out the Campus Colony that served as Hope, Iris, Silas, and Elton's home, and one of their agents—Huck—tries to kill two other survivors that the group meets along their journey ("In This Life"). Literally, *World Beyond* is a story about Hope, and any threat to the Civic Republic obtaining Hope is met with a violent response. However, as a young protagonist coming of age in a zombie infested world, Hope firmly believes in embracing extinction—at least during season one. She argues with her father that his desire to find a cure is useless ("The Wrong End of a Telescope"), and Huck suggests that Hope has to learn to "see the world right, what your father is working for […] the greater good" ("In This Life"). The "greater good" becomes

synonymous with the pre-pandemic world—similar to the "better place" in *Peninsula*—so the first season essentially becomes a kind of dialectic between the two generations about if and when the human species will become extinct.

In contrast to the adults in *World Beyond*, the young protagonists seem to embrace the possibilities of extinction. Many of the characters in endemic contagion narratives draw on the extinction of the dinosaurs as a method for understanding their situation. For instance, in *The Last of Us II,* there is a flashback scene that follows Joel and Ellie on Ellie's birthday. Joel surprises Ellie by taking her to the Wyoming Museum of Science and History. Along the way, she tries to guess what the surprise is: "is it a dinosaur?" she immediately asks (*The Last of Us II*). (It is, in fact, a dinosaur). The player, playing as Ellie throughout this scene, interacts with various dinosaurs at the museum. The first one is a Tyrannosaurus Rex located outside the building and is covered in vines and greenery that have reclaimed the body (*The Last of Us II*). As Ellie, the player climbs its back and stands upon its head, seeing the world from its viewpoint before jumping off into a pool of water (*The Last of Us II*). This flashback provides Ellie—and the player—the opportunity to identify with the Tyrannosaurus Rex, who, like humans, were an apex predator before becoming extinct. The flashback occurs after Joel has died, and it does not further the plot in the video game. Instead, it functions solely as a way for the player to develop empathic intelligibility toward creatures that are already gone, such as Joel and the dinosaurs, and to embrace, however momentarily, extinction.

Similarly, at one point during the journey in *World Beyond*, Hope asks Elton, "does it bother you that we're going to end up like the dinosaurs?" ("The Blaze of Gory"). In response, Elton admits that it doesn't because the knowledge of extinction means they have the agency to make the most of their limited time ("The Blaze"). Instead of merely comparing themselves to dinosaurs, Elton highlights where they differ. The dinosaurs did not know they were going extinct, but human self-awareness means that the characters in *World Beyond* can embrace extinction by making the most of their time rather than fighting the inevitable. In this way, when characters in endemic zombie narratives compare themselves with the dinosaurs, they are developing the necessary empathic intelligibility for embracing extinction: "Inhabiting the literary experience of human extinction rather than anthropocentric endurance can enable what Richard

Kerridge has argued 'we are collectively evading' in our resistance to 'explor[ing] the emotional complexity of our responses to the threat' of extinction as an end point" (McFarland 840).

The use of the dinosaur therefore allows characters "to ponder ecological catastrophe and human extinction while problematizing the mythologizing specter of progress, individualism, and hierarchical exceptionalisms" (McFarland 838). Iris carries a weapon fashioned out of a stick and a Triceratops horn that belonged to Elton's father, who may have been a Paleontologist ("Brave"). Part of this weapon is not only pre-progress, but its pre-human, and by using it, Iris dismantles myths of human progress and hierarchy. Also, by using the Triceratops's "weapons" as her own, Iris can be said to be identifying with the extinct dinosaur, just as Ellie does with the Tyrannosaurus Rex. The weapon becomes a form of sympoiesis whereby Iris and the Triceratops are "making-with" one another in new post-contagion entanglements. Because "Critters do not precede their relatings; they make each other through semiotic material involution, out of the beings of previous such entanglements" (Haraway, *Staying* 60). As a result, Iris' weapon, even though it remains nameless, comes into being at the moment the Triceratops is semantically born and vice versa. The weapon's referent—the Triceratops—makes and is remade by the weapon itself, and by extension, so is Iris.

While the dinosaur is useful in zombie narratives as a signifier of extinction, a better "poster child" for the sixth great mass extinction is the thylacine, also known as the Tasmanian tiger (Jørgensen 122)[93] because it simultaneously embodies the effects of colonisation, climate catastrophe, contagion, and extinction. While characters in the endemic zombie narrative do not explicitly engage with the thylacine in the manner they do with dinosaurs, the characters in *World Beyond* self-identify as "endlings," a term whose meaning is rooted in the history of the thyacine. The thylacine was the world's largest marsupial carnivore until it became extinct in 1936 ("Defining Moments: Extinction of Thylacine"). While Tasmanian tiger fossils have been found in other

[93] While the species is known by either name, I'm choosing to use "thylacine" due to the imperial connotations in the naming of Tasmania. "Tasmania" is associated with the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman. The island's Aboriginal names include "Trowunna," "Trowenna," or "Loetrouwitter" (Newman). While "thylacine" ("dog-headed pouched one") carries with it some implications of colonial thinking since it comes from a history of Latin classification, it does not carry with it as much weight of colonisation and genocide in the Tasmanian region.

regions, such as mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea, for the past 2,000 years they were primarily relegated to Tasmania ("Defining Moments") due to a variety of factors, including hunting, disease and, some scientists argue, the arrival of the dingo, a fellow predator that may have engaged in intra-guild killing (Letnic, Fillios, and Crowther 1).[94] In many ways, the thylacine as indigenous animal suffered similarly to Indigenous peoples. When British colonists settled Tasmania in 1803 ("Early Colonial Administration Records"), they cleared large areas of land and populated them with sheep and cattle, and when their livestock started disappearing, the colonists blamed the thylacine ("Defining Moments"). However, there is no proof that the thylacine was responsible (or at least solely responsible) for the deaths of these animals, and in fact, researchers claim the jaw strength of the thylacine was not enough to kill large livestock ("Defining Moments"). In response, the Tasmanian Government issued a bounty of £1 for an adult thylacine and 10 shillings for a pup, resulting in the loss of approximately 3,500 thylacines ("Defining Moments"). Between 1830 and the 1920s, the thylacine population declined because of a combination of the dingo, the destruction of their habitat, culling, and disease ("Defining Moments"). As a result of the last of these factors, the thylacine, when it is viewed symbolically, embodies the relationship between contagion, multispecies entanglements, and extinction. The last known wild thylacine was shot in 1930, and while the species was listed as protected in 1936, it was too late; the last thylacine—known as Benjamin—died 59 days later in the Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart (Jørgensen 122).

As the thylacine population declined, the Tasmanian Government retained bounties on the species but now only issued them for live thylacines that could be preserved in zoos ("Defining Moments"). Instead of leaving the species alone or developing protected habitats in the wild, the government responded by collecting the remaining thylacines.[95] This change shifted the thylacine as a signifier of indigeneity,

[94] It is not clear who brought the dingo to mainland Australia, nor why they did so, and while debates continue on the topic, studies have linked the dingo to Asian domestic dogs, suggesting they come from similar areas as the New Guinea singing dog, the chow chow, the akita, the Tibetan mastiff, the Chinese indigenous dog, and the Chinese shar-pai (Jackson et al. 202).

[95] In 1930, one protected habitat was established in the Pieman River-Zeehan area where one of the last wild thylacines had been shot earlier that year, but it was too late (Wehner).

danger, and pre- or anti-colonialism to its being a valuable object required for colonial dominance. After all, how can one be a conqueror without conquered species present and on display, whether this be in the zoo or the museum. Alternatively, or more precisely, attempts to preserve the thylacine within zoos can be seen as a restoration project, similar to zombie zoological processes, such as cloning, back breeding, re-wilding, or de-extinction. Unfortunately, after European contact, the thylacine was never allowed to exist solely as itself, but instead it was and continues to be wrapped up in a complex entanglement with how its history and body can serve humans. Thus, the thylacine is the "poster child" for extinction, a zombific one at that, because of the combination of circumstances that led to its death and because the thylacine has been upheld as a symbol of extinction in Australia.[96] As such, the thylacine, or at least Benjamin, is metonymic for all threatened species and is therefore a figure that consistently appears in stories about extinction.[97]

British colonisation turned the thylacine into an endemic species. In addition to the meanings outlined above, the term "endemic" also refers to "animals and plants, whose vulnerability [are] enormous due to smaller populations, [that] are key to their ecosystems and become a [barometer] when it comes to measuring the state of health of a territory" ("Endemic Species and Their Value to Biodiversity"). Endemic species are, after all, signifiers of a particular region. Essentially, endemic species are markers of possible extinction because their presence maintains the health and biodiversity of a region. As a barometer for measuring "the state of health of a territory," the loss of endemic species equates to the diminished health of a territory. Therefore, while the term "endemic" refers to something regularly found within a population, it also refers to a population not regularly found beyond a geographical location, something limited to "a defined physical-geographical place and not anywhere else in the world" ("Endemic Species"). Once the thylacine population became confined to the island of Tasmania 2,000 years ago, it entered into endemicity, so it becomes a symbol not just of extinction but also of the endemic.

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[96] September 7th, the day Benjamin died, is National Threatened Species Day in Australia (Wehner).

[97] *The Hunter* (2011 film); *The Peripheral* (2014 novel by William Gibson); *The Peripheral* (2022 television adaptation; *Suicide Squad* (2019-20); *Extinct* (2021 film), to name a few.

The thylacine is also known by another name that contributes to it as signifier of both extinction and the endemic: endling—a name that also has ties to endemic zombie narratives. The term "endling" was initially coined by Robert Webster and Bruce Erickson in a 1996 issue of *Nature* (Nijhuis; Jørgensen 119). They intended the term to describe the last human in their familial line: "to recognize and honor the finality of the person's situation and their heritage" (Jørgensen 119); however, it did not take hold in this manner. Instead, the term primarily disappeared until 2001 when the National Museum of Australia (NMA) launched *Tangled Destinies: Land and People in Australia*, an exhibition that combines "environment, technology, and social history" (Jørgensen 122). Because the three elements combined within the exhibition were inspired by Donald Worster, an environmental historian (Jørgensen 122), the objects and displays within the exhibition carry with them the signification of environmentalism more generally. Every object on display is imbued through museumification with an aura of environmental damage and/or progress, or both. *Tangled Destinies* contains a display for the extinct thylacine with "endling" and an accompanying definition on the wall, which reads, "*Endling (n.) The last surviving individual of a species of animal or plant*" (Jørgensen 121). While this is not the initial meaning intended by Webster and Erickson, nor did it appear in any dictionary at the time (Jørgensen 125), it became the commonly accepted meaning. Therefore, the exhibition at NMA is the first discursively defined signifier of the "endling," and thus "endling" was adapted to refer to the last surviving member of a species (Jørgensen 119-20). This is also why the thylacine display at NMA figures so importantly and prominently in understanding how the endling functions in endemic zombie narratives.

Through the display of the extinct thylacine, the first endling is born, but it is born within the museum and a narrative of post-extinction (perhaps a discursive de-extinction). Dolly Jørgensen argues that "the museum, as a scientific institution, legitimized endling by adopting it and exposing it to the world" (126). Therefore, it is not solely this latter meaning of endling that took hold and has proliferated, but the process of museumification that shaped its meaning. Museumification refers to "the aesthetic practices that endow objects and sites with 'museum-like' qualities, and bring the values associated with the museum to these objects and sites" (Adinolfi and van de Port 286), so

the endling—any endling—is endowed with "museum-like qualities" as well as the museum's values. In the twenty-first century, public demands on the museum changed to emphasize experience, and thus museumification shifted to encourage visitors to engage more thoroughly in museum displays. As such, museum-goers are not merely witnessing anymore but are participants, and anything on display is and will continue to be modified by and entangled with museum goers. In the thylacine display at NMA, for instance, museum goers are essentially visitors to a memorial because the display consists of a galvanized iron metal box located in the middle of the room (Jørgensen 123) that looks eerily like a mausoleum. The mausoleum asks museum goers to enter a space of loss, grief, mourning, and so on, but more than this, it places the thylacine on par with human loss. After all, mausoleums are not typically used for the bodies of non-humans.

The thylacine becomes metonymic for all species at risk, and when it appears in popular culture, it becomes entangled with McFarland's embracing extinction narratives. But the thylacine specimen at NMA is never telling "its story"; it's telling the stories that the public wants to hear. Jennifer Brian, a Conservator at NMA, admits that people initially "recoil" when they see the thylacine specimen on display in the museum because it creates "a visceral response in anyone who sees it" ("Thylacine"). Brian's hope is that the visceral response forces museum goers to question why they respond in this manner, "and then that questioning moves into compassion and respect and understanding, not just for this thylacine, but for the environment more broadly" ("Thylacine"). Essentially, the specimen asks museum goers to develop empathic intelligibility by entangling themselves with the thylacine, perhaps seeing themselves reflected in it. Kirsten Wehner argues, "thylacine remains have been transformed over time into relics, akin to the sacred skeleton, material instantiations of and spiritual conduits to a reverenced, incorporeal being"; the specimen therefore provides museum goers the opportunity to embrace extinction.

Unfortunately, the relic status of the thylacine can also have the opposite effect to embracing extinction by accelerating the demise of species and reaffirming human survival. While the term "relic" commonly refers to "a thing believed to be sanctified by contact […] preserved as an object of veneration and often enshrined in some ornate receptable" (*OED*), in biology, a "relict species" is that which is "'remaining,' implying a

remnant of something formerly larger" (Grandcolas, Nattier, and Trewick 656)[98] like a clipped root. More specifically, Philippe Grandcolas, Romain Nattier, and Steve Trewick argue, "a relict is defined by the absence of many relatives that are supposed to be extinct" (656), and in fact, "relict" was initially proposed instead of "endling" (Jørgensen 119-20). While this is indeed true of the thylacine, a "relict" also suggests the remaining individual or group are evolutionary descendants, and therefore still "living" remnants of the extinct species—related to it, but somewhat different, similar to Melanie in *The Girl with All the Gifts*. Wehner argues, "we need to also comprehend something of what it was to be a living thylacine, and to know this not abstractly but in a loping, yawning, nuzzling, biting, making a mess kind of way." In fact, Wehner suggests that creating stories of a living thylacine can give the species "empathetic attention" and therefore "further enable some of the thylacine's world-making to continue, telling fresh stories, generating relationships and fostering new ways of being in the world." Wehner seems to be asking for rhizomatic possibilities. Even though museum goers demand endlings, and thus demand extinction and bringing other species to the brink of extinction to reaffirm their own survival, this aim is complicated by including humans in extinction narratives in place of or alongside endlings—in new world-makings with species, such as the thylacine.

Because "endling" is such a new signifier, its birthing through the extinction of the thylacine and the museumification of its body can be used to better understand its signification in *The Walking Dead: World Beyond*. In the same conversation between Hope and Elton about extinction and dinosaurs, Elton refers to the four protagonists as "the last generation" or "endlings" ("The Blaze"). However, Elton points out that the term "endlings" isn't quite right because technically, it would be the last *one* of the four that will be "*the* endling," whose "life and death," he proclaims, "will define us all" ("The Blaze"). Much of the series is therefore about the four protagonists embracing or resisting their endling status. According to Sarah Bezan, an endling represents the loss of an entire species, and as such, it is "always already crushed beneath the weight of its own metonymic function" (214), not unlike the rare thylacine specimen on display at NMA. Bezan asserts that "*the body of an endling is a body exploded*: it is a body that enters into

[98] The term "relict" is an archaic spelling of "relic" (*Merriam-Webster*).

a global economy of biological exchange carrying with it the historical residues that make sense of its extinction" (215). Essentially, the bodies of the four protagonists become methods for understanding and possibly reconciling how the human species reached the brink of extinction in *World Beyond*. As Elton says, "their life and death […] would define us all," so there is a lot of responsibility placed on the endling, not so much to save the species, but to make sense of and ensure that their last moments count; "As the 'first' or the 'last,' these […endlings] are expected to represent the whole of their species line" (Bezan 236). However, four endlings would either dilute or quadruple the metonymic function…or both. So, Iris, Hope, Silas, and Elton are metonymic for the human species as a whole, and by positing themselves as endling(s), they suggest the entire human species is or should embrace extinction in the manner that their generation does.

In her analysis of various stories about endlings, Jørgensen notes how each narrative begins with a definition of the term (133). This is also the case with *World Beyond* where Elton's self-identification as endling is immediately accompanied by an explanation of what the term means. The effect is more than merely explaining the term; it suggests that the characters, and by extension the human species, will always already be framed within endling signification. From the moment they are named as such, the endling will fulfill its endling status. Eric Freedman calls the term "a word with finality" (17), which is true in two contexts here: firstly, the endling literally becomes the termination of a species; and secondly, the story of the endling typically also ends with the death of that endling, so the power in naming determines the finality of the narrative itself. However, the suffix "-ling" signifies both the end and the beginning. "-ling" is a diminutive, which are smaller versions of something and often "associated with young" (Jørgensen 128). According to Jørgensen, "Webster and Erickson (1996) chose endling to represent the end of line as a mirror to foundling as the founder of a new line (because the found child is an abandoned orphan and the parents cannot be traced, a foundling is the start of a new genealogical line.)" (128);[99] after all, two of the four "endlings" in *World*

[99] Because this definition never took hold, it is considered obsolete; however, *World Beyond* seems to embody Webster and Erikson's original definition by not only applying the term to human, but to humans who have no parents—except for Hope and Iris.

Beyond are orphans. The use of "endlings" in *World Beyond* collapses this mirror to represent the four young protagonists as both—the end of a line but also the start of another line. In this case, the four protagonists are smaller "ends," but this also means they are ironically also beginnings, since smaller ends must function within a narrative of a larger end, which is where the pluralization challenges the term's signifieds—they are individuals within a multiplicity in the rhizombie. For example, season one, episode six opens with a voiceover of Iris stating, "for those of us born right before, the end of the world was our beginning" ("Shadow Puppets"). Iris' voiceover demonstrates her embodiment of the end/beginning position, but it also reveals why endemic zombie narratives are populated with characters who come of age amidst the zombie pandemic. In another example from the pilot episode, the inhabitants of the Campus Colony outside Omaha are discussing how they are "monuments of the past," yet the protagonists reject this idea, and instead, they set out on their journey to "find themselves" ("Brave"). They are literally trying to "found" a new way of life that rejects the past. Ergo, they are both founders as well as endlings. These characters do not have a place or past to return to and can only found something new—in this moment, they are truly endlings. The thing about "-ling," though, is that it relies upon its root term; therefore, the "endling" can never function beyond the "end" even as it is a beginning; thus, it is always embracing extinction.

In *World Beyond*, it is the threat of a looming extinction that fuels the endlings on their journey. While Iris and Hope are motivated by their desire to save their father, Silas and Elton have no parents and set out to do something meaningful with their remaining time; Elton claims, "I'd like for the time I have left on this earth to mean something […] to see what's out there before I'm gone" while Silas is trying to move past his childhood trauma ("Brave"). However, all four protagonists firmly believe they are the last generation. For instance, season one, episode five begins with a voiceover of Elton's deceased mother: "even with our resolute will to survive, nature will end us because that is its law, death inevitable, extinction just another of its rules, another part of the life cycle of the very old-world churning with energy. There is no escape from the inescapable, there is no respite from the unceasing, it makes its choices for us. In short, accept the wind; it always wins" ("Madman across the Water"). Accepting the wind—

embracing the power of nature—becomes the mantra for the group. Arguably, we could say that Melanie in *The Girl with All the Gifts* accepts the wind. Moreover, in a kind of dualistic embodiment of and resistance to the idea of being the last, the episode ends with Hope spray painting, "We were here—the Endlings" over a sign ("The Blaze"). Hope's pluralization of the term resists the discourse of being the last; after all, how can there be a last when there are four of them, but by signing her statement as an endling, she is accepting her position as one. It is this dualistic resistance and embodiment that highlights the complexities of embracing extinction.

By positing the four of them as "endlings" in the manner that Hope does, each is invested with the possibility of being *the* endling, which reveals how the endling is always already impossible to identify. For example, the thylacine display at NMA contains several thylacines, including the photograph, the skin, and the rare specimen, each of which belonged to a different live thylacine, yet the term "endling" written on the wall of the display exists in the singular, so which of these remnants is or belonged to the last thylacine? The answer is that all and none of them. None of these remnants came from Benjamin, but the thylacine as an overarching symbol for the endling collapses any distinctions anyway. Similarly, *World Beyond* highlights how there is never really one endling because it is impossible to prove who the endling is until they are gone. It is only the absence of other possible endlings (no more sightings of the species in the wild) that solidifies the singular endling status. In *World Beyond*, the four endlings can only come-of-age once they have separated from one another, suggesting that it is the absence of other endlings that allows for these characters to fully develop. According to Jørgensen, through the "use of endling, we see the move toward making extinction something personal, something that deserves our empathy" (127). This is also the case with endemic zombie narratives where each endling—in this series, Iris, Hope, Silas, and Elton—experiences their own coming-of-age journey to engender empathic intelligibility from one another as well as the viewing audience. Primarily, empathy arises because naming the characters as endlings reveals the futility of the attempt to save them—it is already too late once the endling is born.

Hope's graffiti is not only a recognition and embodiment of being an endling but suggests a message for posterity, complicating her extinction narrative and her endling-

ness. Messages always have an intended readership; otherwise, they function as meaningless signifiers, but if Hope and the others are indeed the last of their species, who will come after to read and understand Hope's message? In *World Beyond*, this graffiti is part of a trail that Hope is leaving for her guardian, Felix, to find. However, the message is also indicative of embracing extinction. For example, the past tense of "were" suggests that the four characters will no longer be here (spatially in this location or possibly temporally still in existence) when the message is found. Perhaps, like *The Girl with All the Gifts*, who or what comes after is not necessarily human; perhaps the future in *World Beyond* belongs to the zombies.[100]

Ultimately, endemic zombie narratives are fraught with endling(s), and the endling is caught in a paradox. Bezan argues, "some extinction narratives are confounded by opposing threads (one, representing finality, and the other, futurity)" (226). The combination of the term endling being saturated with conservatism—a call to action—but one that is already too late, and being posited as plural in *World Beyond* firmly establishes the four protagonists in the television show as markers of both finality and futurity. Bezan goes on to note, "the endling is perplexingly positioned as a 'symbol of hope' in a future where human activity is no longer imagined to be the cause of species extinction, but rather its solution" (224). For example, *World Beyond* is premised on the idea that science can solve any problem and Hope just so happens to be the key to unlocking that science. During season two, episode five, Hope presents a plausible theory that may support her father's research to accelerate the decay of the zombies; the suggestion being that science can effectively alter the natural processes of decay and rid the world of zombies ("Quartervois"). While this emphasis on science is a representation of the return to a *status quo* that Hope is meant to resist, still, much like the discursive embodiment of "endling," "Hope" has no choice but to embody hope. Hope, like the endling, is a marker of both finality and futurity.

[100] Posterity messages tend to accompany narratives that ask humans to consider their own extinction, such as Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 dystopian film *Children of Men*, which depicts a world in which everyone has become infertile. One scene depicts barely readable graffiti stating, "last one to die, please turn off the lights." This message is rather ironic in that it either presumes an action can occur post-mortem, or it suggests that a metaphorical death takes place as the last human contemplates the finality of their existence.

The endling paradox—extinction that invariably constructs futurity—guides the endemic zombie narrative. In a conversation between Elton and Asha, Indira's daughter, Asha asks, "what do you think happens to things when they die?" to which Elton responds, "they break down into their original compounds" ("Family is a Four Letter Word"). However, Asha's reply indicates that this is not the end: "but after they're absorbed into the ground then what? Then they're reabsorbed by plants. Plants then become food for an insect that's eaten by a bird or another animal. The original thing's now part of a bunch of other things" ("Family"). Asha demonstrates the zombific thinking that characterizes the rhizombie. Even though the endling perishes, their bodies "live" on, so to speak, fertilizing and making life possible for other species—they are entangled in myriad forms of sympoiesis. They are thus both finality and futurity, like the internodes of a rhizome, but, more than this, their bodies reveal how they are not solely individuals but are part of Haraway's "terraforming," as discussed in the previous chapter. Multispecies agents "redo ways of living and dying attuned to still possible finite flourishing, still possible recuperation" (Haraway, *Staying* 10). Endlings are thus the ultimate example of a rhizomatic, multispecies approach to the endemic because "they are in relational material-semiotic worlding" (Haraway, *Staying* 13), so regardless of the species, the last will always be an endling. As such, the term linguistically collapses differences between species—regardless of whether it is a thylacine or a human, they are both endlings. Robert Nijhuis argues that "By inventing a noun that describes all of them [the endlings], though, Webster serendipitously connected them to one another, and to a larger, less graspable sense of loss." Jørgensen similarly believes that "All of the pieces named after an endling use a circular motif so that the dead endling is connected to a circle of life built from the parts and bodies of other animals and vegetation that loop and swirl to engulf the bodies" (132). As such, the pluralisation, "endlings," in *World Beyond* might be less about highlighting the potential for each individual to be *the* endling in the end, so to speak, and more about multispecies entanglements and the possibility of multiple endlings. Ultimately, the manner in which Hope both uses the term and embodies the "endling" status reveals how extinction should be addressed not from the individualist, survivalist standpoint, but instead from a multispecies approach that embraces extinction. However, beyond terraforming, can one create sympoiesis with

dead things? To answer this question, I turn to a form of protest that is typically used in response to climate crisis or racialized violence.

Entanglements: Living and Die-in in Sympoiesis

On April 22nd, 2019, approximately 100 people laid down on the ground beneath Hope, a 25.2-metre-long blue whale skeleton that hangs in Hintz Hall at the London Natural History Museum (Montague). These 100 people were staging a "die-in" protest as part of a larger global Extinction Rebellion (Montague) that has been demanding more action against climate change since 2019 (Extinction Rebellion), conveniently coinciding with the beginning of the COVID pandemic. A "die in" is a form of protest in which protestors lie down, pretending they are dead (Kaplan). Die-in protests emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in response to the Vietnam War, nuclear fear, and environmental concerns (Kaplan), but they became popular during the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s (Westengard 274). Contagion (AIDs) ultimately overlaid these other issues. However, they have always been linked to environmentalism and its entanglement with contagion, but also toward queer demonization, racial injustice, and the history informing the birth of the modern zombie—they are, in many ways, entangled in the rhizombie. Olivia Kaplan notes that there was an increase in die-in protests in the US in response to the death of Michael Brown and the rise of extrajudicial violence.[101] For example, on October 22nd, 2014, students from the San Francisco State University held a die-in at Malcolm X Plaza, claiming, "Our bodies will act as physical reminders of how many black and brown lives are taken from us each day by unnecessary police force" (qtd. in Luxen). Kaplan writes, "In 'die-ins,' activists dramatically (re-)enact scenes of violence in their quest for accountability and an end to violence." Notice the use of parentheses around the prefix "re-," which suggests that scenes of violence are not wholly new but exist in a liminal space of past/present—the past denoted by the "re-" prefix and the present denoted by relegating the prefix to parentheses. As such, die-in

[101] On August 9, 2014, Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager who was walking from the convenience store to his grandmother's house in his home neighbourhood of Ferguson (Swaine).

protestors seek a move away from the *status quo*. Ultimately, the purpose of die-ins is that "They make the violence seem more real and the coordinated and unexpected action by the protestors communicates the deep solidarity they have with the victims and their families. The message is also not dependent on slogans or bounded by a particular language since the imagery of dying is universal and transcends culture" (Kaplan). Dying—die-in—is about sympoiesis.

With bodies strewn haphazardly across the floor, die-ins look eerily similar to a sequence of scenes that appears in *The Walking Dead* universe: the tilt followed by the wide angle. The pilot episode of *The Walking Dead* television adaptation follows Rick after he wakes from a coma ("Days Gone Bye"). He stumbles out of the hospital to find rows upon rows of dead bodies strewn across a seemingly abandoned landscape (see fig. 41). The camera begins at his feet, capturing him walking between rows of bodies loosely wrapped in white blankets ("Days"). It then moves up his body in a tilt shot to capture the horrified expression on his face before abruptly switching to a point of view (POV) first-person perspective whereby the audience sees what Rick sees, temporarily identifying with him. Finally, the scene culminates in a wide-angle shot of countless bodies, depicting Rick stumbling, in what appears to be disbelief, between the

Figure 41: A screengrab of Rick exiting the hospital in episode 1.1, 2010.


Figure 42: A screengrab of Rick walking between rows of bodies from *The Walking Dead* episode 1.1, 2010.

rows (see fig. 42).[102] I have argued in Chapter 3 that the shift from closeup to wide shot reveals how the situation is larger than the individual, but moreover, the wide shot makes it difficult to distinguish between Rick and the dead bodies that surround him. Zombie narratives similar to *The Walking Dead* collapse distinctions between the living and dead, such as in season five when Rick proclaims, "we are the walking dead" ("Self Help"). A similar tilt plus wide angle shot occurs in the pilot episode of *World Beyond* when the CRM wipes out the Campus Colony. The camera begins at ankle height, capturing a weapon penetrating the skull of a zombie, then it moves out to a wide angle shot, revealing a lawn strewn with bodies, and a few soldiers finishing off the remaining zombies (see fig. 43). In Rick's scene, for example, the camera begins at ankle height, forcing the audience to inhabit the perspective of the dead body, similar to what a protestor might see while participating in a die-in, yet when the camera's gaze meets up with Rick's, the angle shifts to Rick's point of view, suggesting an interconnection between the dead and the living in this moment. Rick's horrified expression obviously engenders empathy, but it also reveals that empathic intelligibility is about inhabiting the body or aligning with the gaze of the Other, if only temporarily—a sympoiesis.


Figure 43: A screengrab of the CRM in *World Beyond* episode 1.1, 2020.

While not directly discussing zombies *per se*, Haraway asserts, "perhaps the deepest surprises emerged from the relations of the living and the dead, in symanimagenic complexity, across the biomes of the earth" (*Staying* 8). Endemic narratives eventually acknowledge zombies as a kind of co-species for humans due to the constant exposure to zombies. For the characters in *World Beyond, Peninsula,* and *Feed,* zombies are part of their daily lives; they are constantly present. It is rare in these worlds

[102] The wide angle shot of countless dead bodies has historically been a common trope in films that take up themes of contagion, war, race, and oppression, such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

for a character to become infected. Instead of going out on zombie-killing expeditions in the manner that occurs frequently in *The Walking Dead* and *Fear the Walking Dead* and is indicative of survival discourse, the characters in *World Beyond*, for example, mark the zombies with different colours of spray paint to chronicle what they call "migration patterns" ("Brave").[103] Dr. Bennett, while representing the pre-pandemic, still focuses on a kind of co-existence with zombies as well. His scientific advancements include a piece of technology that is attached to zombies to monitor brain chemistry, behaviour, and the changes to behaviour resulting from the zombie's interactions with their environment ("Foothold"). These zombies are endemic—as barometers for their habitats—so the data that Dr. Bennett collects can also provide meaningful information about the environment. While the long-term purpose of this technology is to help Dr. Bennett better engineer a cure, it suggests that the survival of humans relies upon the survival of zombies—one learns how to live by monitoring how the other "lives" in complex "relations of the living and dead," or what Haraway calls "symanimagenic complexity." Symanimagenesis is closely related to sympoiesis, but instead of "making-with," symanimagenesis asks various species to "become-with" (Haraway, *Staying* 154), suggesting that those who engage in symanimagenic complexities are changed, becoming something else through multispecies entanglements, which is what occurs with Ellie and Melanie. In endemic zombie narratives, zombies have become another species for the human characters to live alongside—to alter and be altered by their presence—something both symanimagenic and endemic. Therefore, the focus in these narratives is no longer on eradicating the zombie but in "becoming-with" the dead in the world of contagion.

Addressing zombies from the symanimagenic perspective must take into consideration the fact that "deadly infectious diseases don't usually cause the extinction of their host species" (Beeton, Hoare, and Walker 26); instead, the pathogen is symanimagenic—both parasitic and symbiotic.[104] It modifies and is modified by its host.

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[103] *Days Gone* and *The Last of Us* also use the term "migration" to refer to the movements of zombie hordes.

[104] Parasiticism is often misapplied to antagonistic forms of symbiosis, but as Marilyn J. Roossinck and Edelio R. Baza´n point out, the term "parasiticism" is saturated with misunderstanding "all viruses, and indeed many other symbiotic microbes, are parasitic, meaning they benefit from their hosts by acquiring nutrients from them. This does not mean that they cannot also be commensal or mutualistic; these distinctions depend on whether or not the benefits outweigh the costs" (124).

This is because "To be able to sustain itself, a disease needs to be able to infect, on average, at least one new individual every time it finds a host. To do this it needs to be infectious enough to be able to spread, but not too immediately deadly or it will kill or injure its hosts too quickly, leaving it unable to spread further" (Beeton, Hoare, and Walker 26). In this manner, zombies are less a destruction of the human and more so a form of environmental predation whereby a percentage of prey (humans) and a percentage of predators (zombies) must be ever present in a particular region, semantically calling one another into co-being. One does not elicit the extinction of the other, but rather, they co-exist in various, complex forms of symbiosis. The required relationship denoted by symbiosis is "an intimate relationship (in or on one another)" (Roossinck and Baza´n 124) whereby this coexistence could be antagonistic—having a detrimental effect on the host (Roossinck and Baza´n 125)—or mutualistic—helping the host (Roossinck and Baza´n 128). Therefore, while zombies pose a threat, symanimagenic thinking dictates that the zombies need humans to co-exist. This is evident in *The Girl with All the Gifts* when Dr. Caldwell admits that Melanie's generation—let's call them Generation Z(ombie)—functions as a "symbiote" with the fungus: "the fungus is wrapped around your [Melanie's] brain like ivy around an oak tree" (*The Girl*). Dr. Caldwell is highlighting how the pathogen is both parasitic (infecting and wrapping around Melanie's brain) but also symbiotic (it does not destroy the brain or elicit the extinction of the host). Rather, through symanimagenesis, the fungus and Melanie are "becoming-with" one another. Dr. Caldwell's use of the oak tree simile also naturalizes the relationship between Generation Z(ombie) and the fungus, which is further supported by the fact that when enough "hungries" come together they "turn into a forest" as Melanie calls it (*The Girl*). A similar approach to symbiosis appears in *The Last of Us* in which Ellie's immunity comes from the fungus wrapped around her brain. As such, Generation Z(ombie) is both symanimagenic and endemic.

When species do go extinct, the biggest threat this poses is biodiversity loss ("Endemic Species and Their Value to Biodiversity"), demonstrating how all species are entangled within the symanimagenic process. For example, the loss of certain flora or fauna in an area can result in significant changes to the land, which can put humans and other species in that area at risk ("Endemic Species"). In the video game, *Days Gone*, the

zombies physically alter the landscape in several ways, but one worth noting is the creation of nests that look similar to bird's nests. To create these nests, the zombies in the game must remove branches and other materials from elsewhere, altering those landscapes, so when they create their nests, they significantly alter the spaces and species within the newly infected areas. Nests are built in a variety of places, but often appear in abandoned human dwellings, transforming those spaces from ones designed to exclude nature into ones that become part of nature. Other than humans, such species as birds, wolves, and bears can also become infected in the video game, so the spread of the zombie pathogen disrupts the landscape as well as all species inhabiting it. However, this also functions as a kind of preservation against biodiversity loss. Instead of infected humans rising up and consuming other species, they infect those species, transforming the entire landscape in a way that preserves species through infection. Similarly, in *The Last of Us*, the final stage of zombiism results in the infected attaching themselves to a wall or other structure and sprouting, similar to what happens in *The Girl with All the Gifts*, making entire areas of the world uninhabitable and dangerous for non-immune or uninfected humans. However, in each case, the modification of space is naturalized, whether it's a nest or fungi climbing up a wall. A symanimagenic approach to endemicity recognizes the importance of endemic species to biodiversity—or lack thereof—within a space.

Species and pathogens are not just symanimagenic with one another but also with space. The die-in in London, for example, took place in a natural history museum. As such, the die-in protestors seem to be questioning whether the effects of climate crisis are indeed "natural." Additionally, the use of the museum space reaffirms the role of museumification in the story of the endling. More importantly, as protestors lie on the floor, Hope—the blue whale skeleton—hovers just over their heads, just out of reach. Kaplan notes, "the irony invoked by the die-in—taking the original harmful action and turning it into a symbol of solidarity and criticism—works like a rhetorical trap to amplify the message. It holds a mirror up to the perpetrators and to society to underline the depth of the wrong committed and the massive scale of outrage over it" (Kaplan). However, this can only occur if one embraces extinction. Ironically, Hope the blue whale is already too far gone as it is just a skeleton, but as the protestors lay down and stare up,

they are being asked to contemplate how different from, how similar, and how long until humans become like the blue whale.[105] We have already lost Hope, so all that remains is to embrace extinction.

However, the die-in protest must end at some point. Essentially, the protestors must get up and walk away, going from a newly transformed space of death and dying back into the world of the living, looking eerily like the newly infected zombies rising. The protestors have changed and are changed by the space; they have embraced extinction; they have engaged in the symanimagenic process; they are rhizomatic. McFarland argues, "humans are deeply imbricated in this unfolding extinction event, yet also individually powerless to change anything" (838). However, there is something generative that comes from the transformation. McFarland proposes that "The only optimism lies in cultivating the simultaneous feelings of grief, shared risk, and expansive kindness, as individuals, as communities, as nations, and as a species, toward other people, toward other living beings, toward our many and diverse ecosystems, and toward our selves" (840). Without ever naming it as such, McFarland's embracing of extinction proposes the symanimagenic process.

The previous two chapters argue for a multispecies approach to zombie narratives as well, but the success of the endemic in zombie narratives relies upon characters practicing this multispecies approach in order to live alongside contagion, however complex the entanglements may be. The pre-COVID zombie narratives I discuss in the previous chapters adopt a discourse that dehumanizes the zombie, which makes it impossible to move beyond pre-pandemic problems and the *status quo*.[106] It also returns those narratives back into hope, but also violence, like Sister Tabitha or the Civic Republic Militia.

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[105] Blue whales are not extinct. They were hunted close to extinction during the twentieth century but became the first species globally recognized as a species that required saving (Natural History Museum). COSEWIC classifies the blue whale as endangered, and it is currently unknown how many are still alive today (COSEWIC).

[106] Romantic zombie comedies (rom-zom-coms), such as the 2006 film *Fido* and the 2004 film *Shaun of the Dead*, are early twenty-first century examples of the subgenre's shift toward the endemic. Both films, after all, represent multispecies approaches to the zombie whereby the protagonists form relationships with the zombies and keep them around despite their unpredictable violent tendencies. However, both films return to a *status quo* in the end. For instance, *Shaun of the Dead* ends with Shaun sitting with a zombified Ed to play video games, suggesting that nothing has changed for him and Ed despite Ed's illness.

Evolution: Trans-Fluidity and the "Endemic Child Zombie"

In season two of *World Beyond*, Dr. Bennett claims, "our entire purpose now is to find the way to a healed planet, not for us, but for our children, maybe our children's children. We can still give them that life. We owe it to them" ("Returning Point"). While Dr. Bennett is highlighting environmental progress as the supposed initiative with a "healed planet," drawing on medical discourse as he does so, his shortcomings stem from invoking the reproductive futurity (and hope) marked by what Lee Edelman calls the figural "Child." According to Edelman, "the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust...the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse" (21). Unlike any individual child, Edelman's Child is a political symbol used to call people to action, but it is also used to limit and regulate the actions and beliefs of a nation's citizens. For example, Anita Bryant established a movement in 1977 called "Save Our Children," where she claimed, "I don't hate the homosexuals! But as a mother I must protect my children from their evil influence" (qtd. in Jenkins 121). Essentially, Bryant used the Child as a call to action, as a platform to fuel homophobia. Her platform does not provide evidence that homosexuals are a threat to any real child, so the Child functions as a political tool. As such, the Child has come to embody heteronormativity. Edelman points out that the "Figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights 'real' citizens are allowed" (11). The Child therefore represents reproductive futurity (read: heteronormative) and the narratives supporting futurity, such as hope. Therefore, Dr. Bennett draws on "our children" in this episode as a call to action. First, he invokes the futurity marked by the Child, which is particularly evident in his emphasis not just on "our children" but also on "our children's children"—as potent heterosexual, reproductive citizens. The impetus of this call is not just to help scientifically engineer a cure because the scientists at the CRM have already bought into this narrative, but rather, Dr. Bennett is trying to convince them to leave the CRM entirely ("Returning Point"). Second, even though he identifies climate crisis—"a planet in need of healing"—as the

aim of his call to action, there is no proof that saving any real child will also save the planet. In fact, the opposite may be true.[107] Dr. Bennett, like Bryant, is creating a false parallel, not because the children will save the world or saving the children will correlate to saving the world, but because using the Child is the most effective means of calling people to action.

In *The Last of Us* videogame, Joel, and the player playing as Joel, is placed in a similar situation wherein the Child is set alongside the future of the planet. As discussed in Chapter 4, the final scene asks the player to choose between saving young Ellie—the child—which will result in the doctors not being able to synthesize a cure (but in a complex entanglement, will mean the planet can continue to recover) (*The Last of Us*). The other option is that the player can let Ellie die in order to save humanity, which consequently may also result in a return to the *status quo* and the pre-pandemic problems of ongoing climate change (*The Last of Us*). As noted in Chapter 4, this decision is made for the player when a cutscene reveals Ellie alive in the backseat of a car as Joel drives the pair of them away from the medical facility (*The Last of Us*). However, in the case of *The Last of Us*, saving Ellie is synonymous with saving the planet, so the Child represents a futurity here, but not reproductive futurity or the *status quo* for humanity. Unlike Dr. Bennett, Joel resists "the greater good" and saving the child actually means embracing extinction, a point made all the more clear by the fact that Ellie is a lesbian.

Ultimately, Dr. Bennett and Joel have no choice but to save the Child. Edelman poses the question, "what...would it signify *not* to be 'fighting for the children'? How could one take the *other* 'side,' when taking any side at all necessarily constrains one to take the side *of*, by virtue of taking a side *within*, a political order that returns to the Child as the image of the future it intends?" (19). Essentially, not fighting for the child turns into also fighting for the child. If one does not take up the call to save the Child, then they are also taking a stance on the Child as political figure and thus reaffirm it as such. In the past, I have argued that in zombie narratives, the Child is a paradox, which also seems to

[107] Current debates addressing carbon emissions and overpopulation are trying to determine what kind of impact children have on the environment and what kinds of steps can be made to mitigate that impact (Sticker and Pinkert).

extend to endemic zombie narratives.[108] In the case of non-endemic zombie narratives, the Monstrous Child—that which is both zombie and still figured as a child—is treated more like a child than a zombie (K. Hill iii).[109] The reason why this occurs is because "its surface is saturated with those markers of ideal innocence" (K. Hill 7). Monstrous Children in non-endemic zombie narratives are ideal, hypergendered little girls, who often appear as white with blue eyes and blonde hair; they are typically dressed in frilly dresses, accompanied by a toy, and appear in the singular. I have called these figures "little girl zombies." Some examples include, Sophia from *The Walking Dead*, Sharon from *World War Z* (2006), Penny from *The Walking Dead: Rise of the Governor* (2011), and Little Girl Zombie from *Dead Rising: Watchtower* (2015). The hypergendered surfaces of these little girl zombies make it impossible to see the child as monstrous—adult characters in these narratives react to the little girl zombies by consistently referring to them as "little girls" and treating them more like children than zombies. For example, the Governor in *The Walking Dead* spends what appears to be father/daughter time with a zombified Penny by brushing her hair ("Say the Word"). In a way, the little girl zombie is the first step toward developing empathic intelligibility toward the zombie because of the way they resist being treated as the categorical monster, but this is complicated by the process of transferring empathy from the little girl zombie onto zombies not marked by ideal Child signifiers. This also seems to be true of endemic zombie narratives. For example, the moral debate in *The Girl with all the Gifts* is whether the children are indeed "children." Dr. Caldwell, for example, reiterates to Miss Justineau that they "present as children" (*The Girl*) like the little girl zombie; Dr. Caldwell points out that their surfaces are marked as childlike. As the film progresses, the characters begin to see Melanie less as a monster and more like a child.

To reconcile this Child paradox, I previously proposed the concept of the "Save the Child" discourse: a discourse that seeks to preserve childhood by killing off the figure of the child before they can lose their innocence and futurity. In doing so, the concepts marked by these figures are saved. For example, in Max Brooks' novel, *World War Z*, the

[108] Please see my Masters thesis: Hill, Krista. "Are You Hungrier Than a Fifth Grader? The Rise of the Monstrous Child in *The Walking Dead*." *Dalhousie Dissertation and Theses*. 2016.

[109] Hill is the former surname for Krista Collier-Jarvis.

narrator visits Sharon, a "feral" child who survived the "Zombie War" and now resides in a rehabilitation facility (73). During the zombie outbreak, Sharon was hiding out in a church with a group of other children and their parents (Brooks 75). As the zombies start to break through the windows and doors, Mrs. Cormode, the pastor's wife says, "'the children! Don't let them get the children...Save the children! Save the children!'[...] Abbie cried hard. Mrs. Cormode picked her up. [[Sharon] mimes lifting something, or someone, up and swinging them against the wall.] And then Abbie stopped" (Brooks 75). Mrs. Cormode's actions suggest that the statement "Save the children" is inherently paradoxical whereby one can only "save" the child by killing them. In the end, Mrs. Cormode is not "saving" the child from the zombies, she is saving the child from losing their innocence; she saves or preserves concepts marked by the figural Child rather than any real child character in the novel. While the Child and the "Save the Child" discourse are still prolific in endemic zombie narratives, as is evidenced by Dr. Bennett's call to action, the little girl zombie seems to be absent. This is part of the shift toward endemicity in these narratives—the little girl zombie is replaced by the lichenthrope, which is a queer child. In my research on the little girl zombie, I note how Melanie from *The Girl with All the Gifts* film seems to be an exception to the trope. While the other characters sometimes treat her like a child, she is darker skinned with short hair, she wears pants, she is never depicted with a toy, and she is not the only child zombie in the narrative. In many ways, she is represented as the opposite of the little girl zombie, and this is due to the fact that *The Girl with All the Gifts* is an endemic zombie narrative, so I want to address this outlier from my former research by positing Melanie as the "endemic child zombie"—that which presents like a child who is not saturated with all the markers of Edelman's Child or the little girl zombie.

Unlike the little girl zombie in outbreak, epidemic, and pandemic narratives, the "endemic child zombie" upholds the qualities marking the endemic zombie narrative. Endemic child zombies embrace extinction by refusing to come-of-age; they engage in the symanimagenic process by becoming-with, living-with, and dying-with other species in various kinds of trans-fluidities; and, they resist the *status quo* because they are not embodiments of Edelman's Child. Melanie, for example, has often been read as a queer character whose hunger is expressed through her sexual desire for Miss Justineau (Renner

173-4). While the sexual orientation of the little girl zombie is never explicitly confirmed as heteronormative, the hypergendered quality of the little girl zombie suggests the figure represents a binary gender and heteronormative narrative, but in many ways, they resist being sexualized. In contrast, Melanie is not represented as overly feminine or heteronormative, suggesting that the endemic child zombie resists the gender and sexuality of the *status quo*. However, it is not only child zombies in endemic zombie narratives that resist the binary gender and heteronormative constructs of the *status quo*. In *Peninsula,* Jooni is represented as androgenous, and it is not until late in the film that other characters refer to her as "she." However, Jooni's sexual orientation is never confirmed. While Ellie from *The Last of Us* identifies as cisgender female, she is revealed to be a lesbian. Jooni, Ellie, and other endemic children embody Edelman's proposed "impossible project of a queer oppositionality that would oppose itself to the structural determinants" of the political Child (19). McFarland argues that conventional Western narratives, which I argue include heteronormative constructions of the Child, "are actually salvific operations that suppress the potential of human extinction and, instead, demonstrate the recuperation of individual sovereignty and endurance: the white male human individual as the site of survival, with a female character signaling the potential for heteronormative reproductive futurity" (839). Thomas M. Stuart claims that Gothic characters exhibiting "trans-fluidity" of body, time, space, and so on "sit on borders and boundaries, mocking taxonomic and evolutionary discourses" (223). Stuart, building on Edelman, goes on to note that "these transtemporal, transgender entities ruptures [*sic*] reproductive futurity, the basic foundation of the contemporary social structure" (219). In essence, the "endemic child zombie" disrupts the *status quo*.

Contact with the trans-fluid, Stuart argues, is a "queer disruption" with the possibility of transforming bodies (225). Literally, this is the case with "endemic child zombies" whose bite transforms others. However, more than this, contact with the "endemic child zombie" demonstrates symanimagenic potential for both the endemic child and child zombie as well as other characters in the narrative. Jolene Zigarovich believes that transgothic discourse acknowledges "'trans' as connoting unstable, transient, or in-between, but also . . . as [involving] transformation, development, creativity, reorganization, and reconstruction" (qtd. in Stuart 221). They have the

potential to disrupt the *status quo* and to dismantle and reconfigure pre-pandemic problems, such as queer and gender inequities noted above, but also race (consider Melanie's darker skin in the film) and anthropocentric issues that led to the climate crisis in the first place. Therefore, for endemicity to be fully realized in endemic zombie narratives, Edelman's Child with a capital "C" must undergo some form of symanimagenesis. These characters (unlike their hypergendered little girl zombie counterparts) are also the most likely to survive without the intervention of adult characters. While Miss Justineau saves Melanie several times throughout the film, in the end, Melanie proves she does not need saving, at least not in the manner dictated by the "Save the Child" discourse. It is Miss Justineau's realization that she cannot save Melanie in the manner she has been led to believe children need to be that results in her accepting Melanie not merely as "little girl" but also as monster in the novel: "seeing the child turn into the monster, right before her eyes, has made her understand at last that both are real. There is no future in which she can set Melanie free, or save her" (Carey 72). Miss Justineau's realization becomes symanimagenic whereby she realises Melanie does not need to be part of the *status quo*, but instead allows Melanie to just exist as what she is—both a child and a "hungry."

While the four protagonists in *World Beyond* cannot resist coming-of-age, they can still embrace extinction if the concept of the figural Child is dismantled in the narrative. The final voiceover in the last episode belongs to Elton:

> There was a time I thought that I was going to die, that we were all going to die because I believed that we were the last generation. The endlings. And then for a while, I thought we were the beginning, but that ignores everything that came before, everyone that came before [...] but maybe there is no beginning, maybe there is no end, maybe there just is, and is, is whatever we make it, cause really, we don't get to know. There's no perfect modelling, no way to predict if today is the last day, if the world lasts a year or two or forever. ("The Last Light")

While Elton is ultimately rejecting being the endling, he is also breaking down the structures that maintain anthropocentrism, opting for a symanimagenic, rhizomatic approach. Essentially, "whatever we make it" demonstrates a becoming-with other

species, and an acknowledgement that there is no way to prove if and when humans will go extinct. Elton completely rejects any discourse of the Child, of survival, of saving the species, or of returning to a *status quo* here. Instead, his final voiceover seems to be about existing without beginning or end in the endemic.

In most zombie narratives, "The immediate question of how to survive obscures the more challenging question of how we might live responsibly and equitably in a shrinking – and ever more interdependent – world" (Wald xvii); however, the qualities of the endemic zombie narrative represent opportunities to move beyond the obscurity of survival. If characters do not return to the *status quo*, they can turn to ideas of living responsibly and equitably. Moving beyond the structures that construct and maintain signifiers of the *status quo*, such as hope, the Child, heteronormativity, and so on are required for embracing extinction. McFarland believes, "Perhaps inhabiting extinction is what's necessary to reframe competing human interests into shared precarity and shared concern for all life on earth, toward enabling collective ways of thinking about how to respond to and destabilize those root causes of the climate crisis" (841). This is because the root causes of climate crisis are not merely carbon emissions but exist within a complex entanglement of imperialist thinking, including what Kathryn Yusoff identifies as "conquest, dispossession, enslavement, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and ideologies of individualism," claiming that "imperialism and ongoing settler colonialism have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence" (xiii). In essence, everything I address in this and the previous three chapters together. While endemic zombie narratives suggest that destabilizing the *status quo* is possible if characters begin to embrace extinction, this does not necessarily mean the end to climate crises and systemic violence, but it does present a possibility of moving away from pre-pandemic problems. For instance, in *Feed*, there is still overpopulation, pollution, global warming (Grant 125), xenophobia, and paranoia (Grant 114), but this exists, in part, because the characters strive for the *status quo* and because they cannot seem to find solutions for living alongside the zombies—it is a world predicated on long-term quarantine and consistent viral testing—of contagious overlays. As Stephanie K. Dunning questions, "what if the fall of civilization is the rise of equity; what if the disruption of apocalypse is actually natural justice; what if abolition is not the end of us, but the beginning of us?" (123).

What if, I might add, embracing extinction is not the elimination of the human species, but its necessary transformation?

Ending: Zombie Zoology and the End(emic)

This chapter set out to address the entanglements between contagion and extinction by addressing the function of the endling and the "endemic zombie child" within the rhizombie. On August 16th, 2022, Colossal Biosciences, a Texas-based de-extinction company, announced that it plans to resurrect the thylacine, shifting the thylacine from being a symbol of extinction to a symbol of de-extinction (Evans)—developing a kind of thylacine zombie, if you will. De-extinction is the process whereby an animal that is classified as extinct is "resurrected." Colossal Biosciences joins the long line of scientists, who have been making claims and ultimately failing to bring back the thylacine since 1999 (Evans). Only time will tell if the thylacine also becomes the poster child for de-extinction. However, at the moment, the thylacine remains locked in a mausoleum-esque box, existing merely to motivate mythmaking about endlings and extinction. For now, the zombie is a suitable poster child for de-extinction.

Zombie zoological processes, such as de-extinction, are not necessarily about saving species but about creating new endlings to ensure the anthropocentric superiority of humans over other species. As Jørgensen eloquently puts it, an "endling can be the beginning, but not the end, of new extinction stories" (134). After all, what is to stop humanity from breeding de-extinct species back into extinction? The manner in which the government in *Feed* responds to any species that is not human but can potentially mutate is a prime example. Because any mammal that weighs forty pounds or more can spontaneously amplify (Grant 40), one of the ongoing debates in the novel is how to handle domesticated and wild animals that meet this criterion. During one such debate between two unnamed characters, the first states, "'We can't simply wipe out endangered species because they might undergo amplification,'" to which the other replies, "'No, but it might keep another mother from burying her children after they get attacked by a zombie" (131). The latter draws on the Child as a call to action in this exchange, demonstrating how the proliferation of the Child continues to be a pediment to

symanimagenesis—perhaps this is why the world in *Feed* is still so fraught with pre-pandemic problems. Yet, the protagonist interrupts the above conversation to correct the latter speaker, pointing out that it was not a deer, the victims were teens, not children, and they were illegally trespassing into restricted territory (Grant 131). Correspondingly, Professor Andrew Pask, who heads the development of the technology for the thylacine de-extinction project at Colossal Biosciences, conflates de-extinction with solving the issues that caused extinction to begin with: "To be able to think that we can actually restore some of the damage that we've caused" (qtd. in Linnell). Pask's misconception here demonstrates a resistance to embracing extinction, and without dismantling the *status quo* first, zombie zoological processes are always already part of re-extinction:

> We want to see a thylacine run past, disappear into the trees, and release us from the sadness of its extinction. It's probable that this will never happen, but if we pay attention to the thylacine as not simply a myth or a symbol but as an enduring member of our kin, then we can let it help us develop understanding, compassion, respect, and responsibility for the species still with us. They have their own lives to live, and to lose them is to lose a part of ourselves. (Wehner)

Therefore, de-extinction is about upholding the *status quo* to resist developing the necessary empathic intelligibility for embracing extinction.

Therefore, I want to return to the end. In *World Beyond*, the endlings ultimately fail in bringing down the Civic Republic Militia, and like many zombie narratives, this series falls into the tropes of the subgenre. The last episode opens with the four protagonists efficiently killing zombies; they no longer see the zombies as a co-species but as a threat to be eliminated ("The Last Light"). By the end of the episode, Silas is captured and becomes part of the CRM; Iris sets off Manifest Destiny style Westward to the Portland colony to inform them of the crimes of the CRM; Elton is bitten, but in a quick-thinking amputation, he only loses an arm in what Freud might call a symbolic castration; Hope is a founder/foundling of a new underground colony where she and the scientists that escaped the CRM can work on a way to accelerate decomposition and thus bring about the end of the zombies. The four, I would argue, come-of-age in the end, resisting extinction and returning to the *status quo* that marks adulthood; but, perhaps the

series itself addresses endemic-informed anxieties and provides some potential for endemicity. A post-credit scene takes place in a lab in France where it is revealed that the zombie pathogen was born. Talk of a new "variant" reveals one of the scientists turning into a zombie—but not just any zombie. Unlike the typical slow, decaying zombies that dominate *The Walking Dead* universe, this zombie variant is faster and stronger and can survive a bullet to the brain. New variants in *World Beyond* are more dangerous, more deadly, but they are also signifiers of an endemic; they are, as Webster so put it, "a normal part of [viral] evolution." Thus, for the remaining survivors in *The Walking Dead, Fear the Walking Dead* (2015-2023), and *The Walking Dead: World Beyond* as well as its newer iterations—*Tales of the Walking Dead* (2022), *The Walking Dead: Dead City* (2023-), and *The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon* (2023)—and perhaps for many of the zombie narratives entangled in the rhizombie, the end(emic) is nigh.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Rhizombic:
Frontier Zombies and Asignifying Ruptures

After sixteen years of comic books, Robert Kirkman, creator of *The Walking Dead*, finally ended his supposed "zombie film that never ends" (*TWD, Vol. 1: Days Gone Bye*). In July 2019, the final issue of *The Walking Dead* graphic novel was released, which takes place an undisclosed number of years later after the initial outbreak, when zombies have become scarce. A two-page spread reveals a new railroad under construction and heading off into the horizon, a corral of horses, a stagecoach, and a woman riding horseback with a rifle slung across her back and a cowboy hat firmly placed upon her head (see fig. 44). In other words, the spread looks like something straight out of a Western. On the following page, Eugene—the survivor responsible for the new railroad—greets a few newcomers: "welcome to the western front!" (Kirkman, *TWD: Vol. 32: Rest in Peace*). The events of this graphic novel take place somewhere around the middle of the twenty-first century, more than 150-200 years after the initial settling of the American West. Yet, it is as if the characters have forgotten that America was already settled prior to the zombie apocalypse; it is as if they have overlooked the fact that railroads already extend and connect all points of the country; it is as if the frontier has returned and been resettled. Many American zombie narratives inevitably become stories of resettling the West; in addition to Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022), zombie

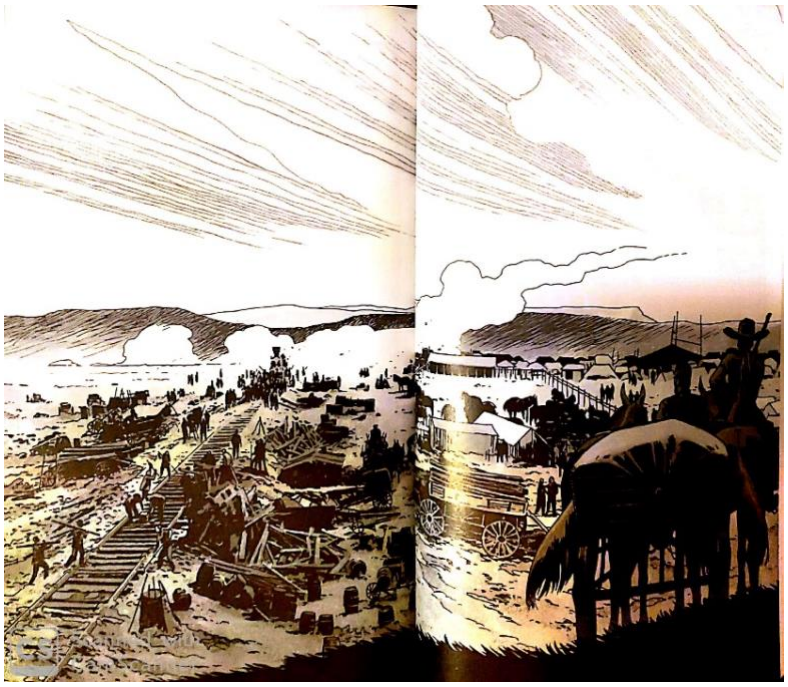

Figure 44: *The Walking Dead Vol. 32: Rest in Peace*; art by Charlie Adlard, 2019.

Westerns include *Z-Nation* (2014-2018), *Zombieland* (2009), and *Zombieland: Double Tap* (2019).

The two-page spread above is devoid of any post-settlement/pre-zombie technology, which suggests that America is a *terra nullius* of post-zombie possibilities and that everything between the initial settlement of the West and the rise of the zombie has been erased; thus, this final issue suggests that America is empty and needs to be (re)colonized, manifest-destiny style. When Manifest Destiny first emerged in 1845, it dictated "the right" for America to "fulfill its God-given mission to overspread the entire North American continent" (Wilsey 2). Even after the settlement of America, narratives—especially post-apocalyptic narratives—continue to draw on the myth of Manifest Destiny "in times of trouble, [as] Americans have upped sticks and headed en masse for the Golden State [California] in hopes of a better future. It was the terminus of the nation's continental Manifest Destiny" (Sardar and Davies 3). Zombie Westerns are not merely seeking to colonize, but to (re)colonize America.

By relegating the "re" to parentheses, I am questioning whether the initial colonisation of America ever ended prior to its "renaissance" in zombie apocalypse narratives. Zombie Westerns, such as *The Walking Dead*, suggest that colonisation is an ongoing process that must be constantly enforced and re-enforced. The American populace seems to consistently forget their own past—of Indigenous peoples and of pre-zombie civilisation—and the rhizombie interrupts this kind of (re)colonial erasure. In this Conclusion, I analyse representations of Indigenous culture in *The Last of Us, The Walking Dead, Zombieland,* and *Zombieland: Double Tap*, positing that, like a rhizome, these moments are asignifying ruptures, even as these narratives reinforce Manifest Destiny and problematically suggest that Indigenous peoples are gone. The rhizombie, with its proposal for a more entangled approach to contagion, climate change, and systems of racialized oppression, can potentially disrupt (re)settlement and (re)colonisation. Unlike the narratives discussed in Chapters 1-5, zombie Westerns seem to recognize their own entanglements in the rhizombie, and as a result, they have the potential to move beyond (re)colonisation and thus possibly represent greater possibilities for living with contagion, climate change, and racial oppression.

Like a Rhizome Cowboy: Three and Half Minutes with an Indigenous Couple

In the opening scene for episode six of *The Last of Us* television adaptation, protagonists Joel and Ellie break into the cabin of an older Indigenous couple: Marlon (Graham Greene, Oneida) and Florence (Elaine Miles, Cayuse/New Perce). During this encounter, Joel attempts to assert dominance over the couple to garner information about the potential location of his brother, Tommy; moreover, Joel and Ellie are lost and trying to reorient themselves. As he does in other moments from both the tv show and the video game, Joel asks them questions to see if their stories match. However, unlike other similar scenes in *The Last of Us*, neither Marlon nor Florence exhibit signs of distress. Instead, they sit down comfortably in their chairs, they banter back and forth, they laugh at Joel's attempts at coercion, and Florence even makes soup for the pair of intruders. These Indigenous characters are not present in either of the video games, nor do they appear again on the show; in fact, there are no explicit references to Indigenous peoples or cultures in *The Last of Us* except for this short three-and-a-half-minute scene.

After the episode aired, mainstream and social media focused primarily on the appearances of Marlon and Florence. Pete Volk noted how the actors impressively "steal the spotlight"; they are "meaningful"; they represent "much-needed human connection." Similarly, Jeffrey Speicher refers to their interaction as "light, even charming." Ultimately, this scene does not last long enough, so fans demanded more appearances of the couple (Wilkinson). The attention and demand for Marlon and Florence is not necessarily because they are Indigenous; fans do not seem to be calling for more Indigenous representation on the show *per se*. Rather, fans seem to focus on two things: first, the couple's relationship—they are relaxed and familiar and provide much-needed comic relief in a post-apocalyptic world; second, the stark contrast between the survivalist methods common in most zombie Westerns and the seemingly carefree country living of the couple—it is as if nothing has changed for these two despite the world being overrun by zombies. So, while fans and the media do not focus specifically on the couple's Indigeneity, some of what is noted here is born from aspects of

Indigenous ways of knowing and being, of living alongside contagion. Volk argues that "Marlon and Florence remind us there are other ways to live with each other and the world." Overall, these characters add something to the rhizombie and the world in *The Last of Us* that we did not even know we were missing: Indigenous peoples simply being Indigenous peoples regardless of contagion.

As I note in Chapter 4, *The Last of Us* casts Joel as an American cowboy character, and like the other zombie narratives listed above, *The Last of Us* can be considered a zombie Western. The zombie Western is a relatively underdefined subgenre. It draws on elements of both the Western and the Gothic, and because both genres are firmly rooted in colonial pasts, it is unsurprising that the representation of Indigenous peoples eventually succumbs to a similar colonial program, although this is not the original aim of the subgenre. Susan Kollin classifies the Gothic Western as a kind of anti-Western, which "often operated by disrupting the confidence of the national narrative and by examining how myths of the West function to repress the underside of American development" (676). Essentially, Gothic Westerns draw on the Gothic's penchant for unsettling—figuratively, as it is designed to produce spaces of excess and the uncanny, and literally, because it questions settlement itself. The Gothic "unsettles the idea of America" (Goddu, *Gothic America* 4). It "foregrounds the 'historical horrors' of race that make national identity possible but that must be repressed in order to sustain it" (Kollin 677), and, of course, part of that national identity in the US is Manifest Destiny. Kollin argues that "Gothic elements enable the return of the racially repressed, allowing the author to restore to memory the buried history of the region's indigenous inhabitants while highlighting the social costs of Euro-American expansion in the region" (676). However, while the Gothic portion of the Gothic Western has the potential to "dismantle myths of the West, especially myths of Western exceptionalism" (Kollin 678), I argue that this only becomes possible in zombie Westerns when these narratives do not fully pursue the frontier.

Leif Sorenson argues that the rise in concerns about futurity, combined with the culture of uncertainty that permeated the twenty-first century, provides the optimal conditions for the emergence of Colson Whitehead's zombie novel *Zone One* (560). While *Zone One* cannot be classified as a Western *per se*, Sorenson importantly

highlights a motivating force behind the rise of zombie narratives during this time. Perhaps the zombie narrative of the twenty-first century is a response to uncertainty in general. Narratives, such as *The Walking Dead* and *Zombieland*, draw upon the Western's "nostalgia for an idyllic past" when things appeared to be binary—good/bad, settler/Indigenous, and so on (Rees 81), and return to a time in which outcomes are already assured. If we already know that the "American hero" successfully conquers the frontier and settles the West, then drawing on the tropes of the Western during times of cultural upheaval may function as a way of playing out these fears, knowing that society will return to a place of resettlement, similar to the motives behind families moving Westward during the Great Depression, as noted earlier. When discussing the popularity of Westerns, Rees argues that "*The Walking Dead* replicate[s] the Western's appeal to liberation":

> life on the frontier is a way of imagining the self in a boundary situation—a place that will put you to some kind of test. In effect, the Western affirms trial by combat as a legitimate indicator of moral superiority for individuals (and national and ethnic identities), a generic convention so appealing to Americans that 'the Western, for American audiences, was not only one more genre; it was a—perhaps *the*—national genre. (84)

The key concept that Rees reveals here is the role of affirming "national and ethnic identities" combined with a penchant for "liberation," which, as Rees reveals, is linked to violence. For example, the zombie—as monster—liberates the survivor from having to justify their violence toward these monsters. White supremacist characters on *The Walking Dead*, such as Merle, can justifiably kill as many non-white zombies as they wish for the sake of preserving American national identity.

As I previously mentioned, *The Walking Dead* follows Rick Grimes—a small-town Deputy in Georgia—as he awakes from a coma and searches for his family in a post-apocalyptic zombie wasteland. Upon finding his wife and son, he leads a group of survivors through Georgia as they seek to eventually re-establish some semblance of the America in which they have lost. In the first issue of the graphic novel and the first episode of the television series, Rick enters a seemingly abandoned Atlanta on horseback with a bag of rifles slung across his back. Rees claims that Rick is "repurposing his

masculinity with rifles and a horse" and is thus embodying "the Western trope of the 'new sheriff in town'" (83). Rick becomes the moral compass that brings order to the zombie frontier and eventually settles the West; the graphic novel culminates in countless small Western towns connected by the railroad. The image of Rick entering Atlanta in the graphic novel (see fig. 45) is so effective for establishing *The Walking Dead* as a Gothic Western that the creators of the television series saw fit to reproduce nearly every detail of the original (see fig. 46). Additionally, the woman on "the Western front" that I previously discussed also reproduces of this scene—she is even wearing Rick's cowboy hat. While Rick's initial foray as horse-riding gunslinger is met with failure—he is overrun by zombies, his horse is eaten, he drops his guns, and hides in an abandoned tank—his status as cowboy settling the West does not break down. Rees argues that "Rick's loss results from his stubborn commitment to the ideology of the old world [which] likewise will be consumed" (83), but what Rees overlooks in this scene is the role of place in the breakdown of the "old world"—a pre-zombie world. Rick's "old world" Western settler ideology has no place in big city spaces, such as twenty-first century Atlanta. This is why the beginning of *The Walking Dead* becomes a regression from twenty-first century America back to the nineteenth century frontier and settlement; Rick realises that city centers are the hub of zombie activity and technology and therefore pose a greater threat. As a result, all markers of industrialized society and technology must be rejected in order to survive. The series thus effectively erases cities from the

Figure 46: *The Walking Dead vol. 1: Days Gone Bye*; artwork by Tony Moore, 2004.

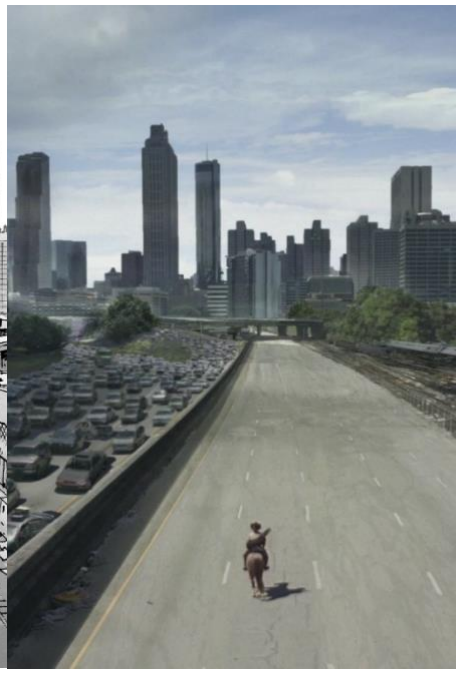
Figure 45: A screengrab of Rick entering Atlanta from episode 1.1, 2010.

narrative—that is, until later spinoffs, such as *The Walking Dead: Dead City* (2023-) and *The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon* (2023). Interestingly though, the return only goes as far back as the Western frontier, so the narrative creates "progression" as the characters begin to resettle it, suggesting that the Western frontier and settlement were "the golden age" of Americanisation and Manifest Destiny and nothing existed prior to it.

The tendency for zombie narratives to lean toward the Western is not limited to *The Walking Dead*. Many zombie narratives that take place in the Southern United States, including but not limited to *Zombieland* (film; 2009), *Z Nation* (TV; 2014-18), and *Black Summer* (TV; 2019), draw on similar themes, tropes, and myths of the Western. *Zombieland* follows unlikely "hero" Columbus as he teams up with three other white American survivors—Little Rock, Wichita, and Tallahassee (all named after the places in which they were born). The last is meant to represent the gunslinger of the West in his cowboy boots, leather jacket, "real deal Brazil" hat,[110] and his refusal to abide by any pre-established laws. Columbus even compares Tallahassee to Yosemite Sam—the cowboy-hat-wearing, double-pistol-toting cartoon character from the Looney Tunes (*Zombieland*). Columbus' Northern American big-city sensibilities barely keep him alive in comparison to Tallahassee's Southern values that draw on tropes of the Western. The four survivors travel west to a supposedly zombie-free amusement park in California. When they finally reach their destination, they realise that the West is not empty, but overrun with zombies, resulting in a final stand where they must battle it out for the land. In the final showdown, the camera pans along the ground to unveil a seemingly endless pile of bodies before finally revealing

Figure 47: A screengrab of Tallahassee in *Zombieland*, 2009.

[110] The Real Deal Brazil hat is not far off from the cowboy hat. It is specially designed using materials and knowledge that are found in "a remote part of the country where gun-toting highway bandits often held sway" ("The Perfect Canvas"), not unlike the frontier.

Tallahassee standing victoriously in the center where he kisses his guns before reholstering them (see fig. 47). Meanwhile, the soundtrack and the twang of the guitar playing in the background feel like they come straight out of a spaghetti Western.[111] Like Rick, Tallahassee's status as Western gunslinger saves the day, and the four survivors ride off (in a black SUV, not on horseback) into the night.

Dendle argues that "zombie worlds are fantasies of liberation: the intrepid pioneers of a new world trek through the shattered remains of the old" (qtd. in Rees 81). Part of the liberation that occurs in *The Walking Dead* is the realisation that, if Indigenous peoples are positioned as monster, then the characters, such as Merle—can justifiably slay them. This mentality harkens back to the frontier where "Many Westerns do characterize racial Others—usually Native Americans—as a threat to their (white) protagonists, their construction as savages outside of the laws of civilized society making them fair game for legitimized violence" (Rees 86). Parallels between the Indigenous person on the frontier and the zombie in the Gothic Western are evident; both are native Others and represented as—potential—cannibals (Sartain 252). In his statement on the "frontier thesis," Turner states that America must experience "a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line" in order for effective "Americanization" to occur (1-2). Zombies are literally a seemingly endless and "continually advancing frontier line" that tests the survivors physically and morally.

"Zombie Kill of the Century": Asignifying Ruptures and Pretendians

It is critical to point out that there are no single representations in these narratives of an Indigenous person as a zombie. Unlike the short appearance of Marlon and Florence in *The Last of Us*, there are no depictions of Indigenous peoples at all. Rather, there are many references throughout *Zombieland* and *Zombieland: Double Tap* that function as what Deleuze and Guattari call asignifying ruptures. For Deleuze and Guattari, the "Principle of asignifying rupture" is that "A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines"

[111] The song playing during this scene is "Estasi Dell Anima," which was created by Dave Sardi for the film.

(9). They go on to explain how "Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another" (Deleuze and Guattari 9). Thus, a lack of signifier is still a form of signification, and the rupture itself, as a kind of asignification, is also rhizomatic and points to an absence of referents as a point of connection to its referents. The lack of explicitly including Indigenous peoples, as well as the misrepresentation of Indigenous culture, in zombie Westerns are rhizomatic in that they function as asignifying ruptures. While we might be tempted to frame these scenes as part of the vanishing Indian trope, they do not quite fit. For one, many of the representations appearing in zombie Westerns are beyond the active gerund—"vanishing"—and instead would more accurately be termed as "vanished," but more importantly, to signify a vanishing Indian, the signifiers must actually embody Indigeneity. Instead, the asignifying ruptures that appear in these narratives are false representations that signify American performances of Indigeneity.

An asignifying rupture occurs in *Zombieland: Double Tap* when Tallahassee's cowboy status is blended with a "Blackfoot ancest[ry] he may or may not have had." In the final scene, Tallahassee and the other survivors find themselves battling a horde of zombie variants that are faster and more difficult to kill. Ultimately, they form a gauntlet atop a tower, and Tallahassee leads the zombies over the edge. During the scene, Columbus narrates, "you can't write the history of zombieland without telling the story of one momentous day. The day one free man made the ultimate sacrifice, and paid respect to the Blackfoot ancestors he may or may not have had. The day he led the first, the last, the only great American zombie jump" (*Zombieland: Double Tap*). Columbus' narration is a reference to a story told earlier in the film by Tallahassee, who tells Columbus about "the great Buffalo jump," which was apparently a hunting tactic employed by his Blackfoot ancestors (*Zombieland: Double Tap*). Both the final scene and Tallahassee's story are asignifying ruptures; they lay claims to Indigeneity that point to the absence of Indigenous peoples and culture in a way that entangles Indigeneity into the film.

While Norman Reedus, who plays Daryl Dixon on *The Walking Dead*, is of Irish, Scottish, English, and Italian descent (Hackie), the show similarly sets him up "in the role of Indian sidekick to Rick's Lone Ranger persona" (Rees 90). Rees highlights Daryl's skills with a crossbow, his connections with nature, and his skills as an expert tracker as placing him in this position (Rees 90). Examples of this can be found in "Cherokee Rose" from the second season of the series, in which Rick and his group of survivors find refuge on a farm as they continue to search for Sophia—Carol's daughter who was lost in the forest a few episodes prior to this. After a failed search, Daryl brings a flower to Carol to comfort her, claiming,

> It's a Cherokee rose. The story is that when American soldiers were moving Indians off their land on the Trail of Tears the Cherokee mothers were grieving and crying so much 'cause they were losing their little ones along the way from exposure and disease and starvation. A lot of them just disappeared. So, the elders, they, uh, said a prayer. Asked for a sign to uplift the mothers' spirits, give them strength and hope. The next day, this rose started to grow right where the mothers' tears fell. ("Cherokee Rose")[112]

In this scene, Daryl adopts the position of Indigenous oral storyteller in a manner similar to Tallahassee. Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson believes that "storytelling [for Indigenous peoples] is an important process of visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives" (34). Oral storytelling, while appropriated by the white character, can rupture coloniality: unlike any white dominant cultural practice in the episode—it is the Indigenous story that is the source of Carol's comfort as she becomes temporarily more hopeful after hearing the story. Because the story is meant to engender hope that Sophia will be found, and because it is always already entangled with Indigenous bodies (the tears of the Cherokee mothers), it functions as a reminder of Indigenous culture and the role that the American frontier played in settler colonial genocide. As the story is told, Indigenous culture is called into being as an asignifying

[112] In 1839, the Cherokee Nation was forced West of the Mississippi by the United States, resulting in the deaths of approximately 4,000 people and resulting in what is called, the "Trail of Tears" (Perdue 14-15).

rupture. Even as Daryl is using a story about a culture that is possibly extinct in zombie overrun America to suggest there is hope of finding a lost little girl, all he has returned with is a Cherokee rose symbolic of many lost little girls, suggesting that Sophia will never be found. Therefore, this story positions the group of survivors as potentially going the way of the Cherokee, so that they identify not as frontier cowboys in this moment, but, problematically, as Indigenous survivors. In terms of the rhizombie, what this can do is ensure the continued survival of Indigenous stories.

In contrast, the use of white characters as signifiers for absent Indigenous peoples in *Zombieland* can reinforce the self-definition of the dominant group as colonizers. In one scene, Little Rock adorns an Indigenous headdress, picks up a spear, and runs smiling through the room as the rest of the characters destroy (presumably knock off) Indigenous artifacts in the background (see fig. 48). Little Rock is played by Abigail Breslin, who is of English, Irish, and Jewish descent (Follers), and there is no indication in the film that her character has Indigenous ancestry. The headdress she wears is a halo warbonnet that was only adorned by men, specifically warriors and chiefs ("Native American Headdresses"). They were scarcely worn, and even then, only by a few tribes on the Southern plains ("Native American Headdresses"). The red tipping of the feathers of warbonnets, such as the one worn by Little Rock, signifies commemoration for great deeds, and each feather had to be individually earned by the wearer ("Native American Headdresses"). The proliferation of the feathered warbonnet in American Westerns is a direct result of settlement and "the American tourist industry, which expected Native Americans to look a certain way" ("Native American Headdresses"). Therefore, the warbonnet is constructed by the dominant culture for the purposes of tourism. While the headdress may be a signifier of Indigenous culture, the lack of a referent owing to the fact that it has dissolved into an object of tourism moves it into the realm of asignification. Because a rhizome is an


Figure 48: A screengrab of Little Rock running through a Kemosabe, 2009.

assemblage, it is "continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles" (Deleuze and Guattari 4). While the story of the Cherokee rose and the adoption of the warbonnet are Indigenous asignifiers, they have the potential to rupture (re)settlement. These examples act as reminders not just of lost or absent Indigenous cultures, but of America's colonial program. They are crucial figurations of rhizomatic possibilities.

In the same scene from *Zombieland,* the four survivors release pent-up aggression by destroying a "Kemosabe" filled with various souvenirs and artifacts—primarily Indigenous. After Columbus accidentally knocks something over and breaks it, Tallahassee encourages him to "break another one" (*Zombieland*), so he does, resulting in all-out mayhem. The Kemosabe also becomes a kind of asignifying rupture. Not only is it a very real retail chain in the US that promises "the cowboy experience" (*Kemosabe*)—albeit appearing quite different from the shop in *Zombieland*—but it is presumed to be an invented term for the purposes of the *Lone Ranger* television show (A. Harris). While the true origin of the term is still being debated, it is generally held that in 1933, Fran Striker and Jim Jewell created the term to "sound Native American" (A. Harris); therefore, the term—and by extension the shop that appears in *Zombieland*—always already signifies an idealised white representation of Indigenous peoples; a signifier that is, by all intents and purposes, also asignifying as it has no referent. There is no vanishing Indian here because any "real" Indigenous was never present to begin with. This is the last scene that stands between the group of survivors in *Zombieland* and the West, suggesting that they must eliminate the Kemosabe, that marker of false cowboy representations of Indigeneity, in order to progress West. In a way, they are not eliminating Indigenous culture but the false creation of Indigenous culture that American Manifest Destiny predicated itself upon. Oh, the rhizomatic possibilities this leaves us with.

Returning to the final issue of *The Walking Dead*, survivors Carl and Lydia are riding horseback toward the "western front" when they come across a place where the sky is full of birds (Kirkman, *Rest in Peace*). Carl states, "I read about this once. How when settlers first came to this country, they could hunt by blindly firing their guns into the air when a flock passed overhead […] we brought the population down…I guess there's not enough of us left to do that" (Kirkman). In many ways, Carl's words reflect those of the Cabot character from the *Heritage Minutes* that I discuss in Chapter 3. Still

in keeping with the Western motif, Carl's comment, because it is supported by his experience in post-zombie America, suggests that the history books are right, at least in terms of the adverse effects that humans have had on the environment. Perhaps, then, we can read *The Walking Dead* as a climate narrative. This panel, as in all panels that came before it over the course of sixteen years, reinforces Manifest Destiny as the characters traverse West through a land that is supposedly empty, suggesting "there's not enough" people in America to reduce the population of its wildlife.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I briefly quoted Kirkman as saying that *The Walking Dead* is the "zombie film that never ends" (*Days Gone Bye*). Taken literally, this is untrue, as the original comic book series has ended—and, I guess, was never really a film anyhow. Taken less literally, Kirkman is pointing to something inherently unique about the Western and its subgenres. The West must be settled and resettled if America is to maintain its grand narrative of Manifest Destiny. After all, "the post-apocalypse reintroduces the frontier to society" (French), that is, if it ever disappeared, so if we are to have zombie narratives, we will inevitably have frontier narratives, but we also have all other narratives woven within the rhizombie, and so, without Indigenous peoples, we still have asignifying ruptures in the frontier. Stephen Graham Jones states that "The future stories that deal with Indian stuff that I find most authentic, finally, are those that are informed by the past, as in, hey, we know what happened last time, we're going try a different variation now" (qtd. in Dillon 212). While this is true of such Indigenous-made zombie narratives as *Blood Quantum*, other narratives, such as *The Walking Dead* and *Zombieland*, continue to tell the same story of the Western frontier and settlement, and thus continue to commit a program of colonisation and (re)colonisation. But, there are rhizomatic possibilities in the ways in which these narratives draw on Indigenous culture.

Rhizombic Possibilities: Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being with Contagion

The idea for this study ultimately came to me in 2020, amidst the first COVID-19 lockdown here in Kjipuktuk/Halifax, as I stood in line to enter the grocery store. I stood there with my mask on, six feet behind the person in front of me and six feet ahead of the person behind me. I gazed sadly at the lonely faces of those around me. When I looked

down, a wet and dirty discarded face mask caught my eye. It was part of the environment now with its dirty stains and soaked edges, but it also invaded the environment. I stared at it, and I wondered how we so readily forgot about our commitments to the environment in our newly established relationships with contagion. We can, after all, be safe and avoid contagion while still being climate conscious. I could not bring myself to return to the grocery store again—it was a task my husband had to take over because the sad faces and discarded masks were too much. As such, this project asks that we don't forget about our environment and our oppressed groups in the age of contagion. Mark Bould proposes a similar idea, asking, what if all the stories we tell are "About climate change?" (17). Bould claims that "The Anthropocene makes for an easy story. Easy, because it does not challenge the naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity's strategic relations of power and production. It is an easy story to tell because it does not ask us to think about these relations *at all*" (12). It really only asks us to look at one thing at a time, but the rhizombie, which engages with Haraway's Chthulucene and symanimagenic possibilities as well as Deleuze and Guattari's properties of the rhizome, with Indigenous ways of knowing and being and the history of Black representation in America, asks us to think about all possible relations all the time in all their multiplicities. Haraway asks us to "stay with the trouble," and the rhizombie presents the possibility of doing so.

So, what rhizomatic possibilities exist in those three-and-a-half minutes that we spend with the Indigenous couple, Marlon and Florence, in *The Last of Us*? Well, during this encounter Joel tells the couple "they've found a great place to hide," to which Marlon replies, "hide? Came here before you were born, Sonny." Marlon and Florence do not live in their cabin in the woods to survive the zombies that populate this world; they have just always been there. They did not search for "security theatre" or intense governmentally regulated forms of quarantine that are common in Grant's zombieverse, nor did they seek to re-establish Western settlements like the survivors in *The Walking Dead*; they did not search for a cure or immunity. Marlon's statement suggests Indigenous presence on the land long before the zombie apocalypse, and undeterred by the pathogen running rampant across the world, they will most likely still be on the land long after. What Marlon and Florence represent is not just Native presence, as Grace

Dillon calls it, but that there are better ways of living upon a post-apocalyptic, contagion-infested, environmentally-disastrous, racially-torn landscape, but only if we make space for more Indigenous ways of knowing and being and their rhizombic possibilities.

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