

'We Are All Infected'

The Derridian Imaginary of the Human Event in *The Walking Dead*

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What's engaging and artistically real is, taking it as axiomatic that the present is grotesquely materialistic, how is it that we as human beings still have the capacity for joy, charity, genuine connections, for stuff that doesn't have a price? And can these capacities be made to thrive? And if so, how, and if not why not?

David Foster Wallace

Abstract

Contemporary TV series are having a great success and influence in our postmodern societies. The zombie phenomenon is getting everyday bigger audiences as well. Perhaps, this is the reason why the number of TV series about zombies is also growing. This paper uses the theory of social imaginaries to show the manner in which one of these before mentioned media products, the series *The Walking Dead*, invites us to picture or imagine the human through a new characteristic of the survivors: that of being infec-

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ted. This new state shows how this TV fiction introduces and potentiates a new idea of humanhood as eventual and impossible for the naturalistic and economical reasoning. In order to clarify this idea of the human being as someone who cannot be reduced to the mere scientific discourse we invoke Derrida and his attempt of defending the human difference.

Keywords

Derrida; anthropology; human; event; *The Walking Dead*; TV series; social imaginaries; zombie (Source: Unesco Thesaurus).

‘Estamos todos infectados’ El imaginario derridiano del evento humano en *The Walking Dead*

Resumen

Las series de televisión contemporáneas están teniendo un gran éxito e influencia en nuestras sociedades posmodernas. El fenómeno del zombi también está consiguiendo audiencias cada día más grandes. Tal vez, esta es la razón por la que el número de series de televisión sobre zombis también está creciendo. Este artículo utiliza la teoría de los imaginarios sociales para mostrar la manera en que uno de estos productos de los medios antes mencionados, la serie *The Walking Dead*, nos invita a imaginar al humano a través de una nueva característica de los supervivientes: la de estar infectado. Este nuevo estado muestra cómo esta ficción televisiva introduce y potencia una nueva idea de la humanidad como eventual e imposible para el razonamiento naturalista y económico. Para aclarar esta idea del ser humano como alguien que no se puede reducir al mero discurso científico, invocamos a Derrida y su intento de defender la diferencia humana.

Palabras clave

Derrida; antropología; humano; evento; *The Walking Dead*; series de televisión; imaginarios sociales; zombie (Fuente: Tesoro de la Unesco).

‘Estamos todos infectados’ O imaginário derridiano do evento humano em *The Walking Dead*

Resumo

As séries de televisão contemporâneas estão tendo um grande sucesso e influência em nossas sociedades pós-modernas. O fenômeno do zumbi também está conseguindo audiências cada dia maiores. Talvez, esta seja a razão pela qual o número de séries de televisão sobre zumbis também está crescendo. Este artigo utiliza a teoria dos imaginários sociais para mostrar a maneira como um destes produtos da mídia antes mencionada, a série *The Walking Dead*, nos convida a imaginar o humano através de uma nova característica dos sobreviventes: a de estar infectado. Este novo estado mostra como esta ficção televisiva introduz e potencializa uma nova ideia da humanidade como eventual e impossível para o raciocínio naturalista e econômico. Para esclarecer esta ideia do ser humano como alguém que não se pode reduzir ao mero discurso científico, invocamos a Derrida e sua tentativa de defender a diferença humana.

Palavras-chave

Derrida; antropologia; humano; evento; *The Walking Dead*; séries de televisão; imaginários sociais; zumbi (Fonte: Tesouro da Unesco).

Introduction

Since the beginning of this century, perhaps as a result of *The Sopranos*, there has been a considerable increase in the number, viewing and release of series from the United States. Whilst there have been hit TV series in the past that were followed by large audiences, never before have so many series of near-cinematographic quality and of an unparalleled narrative complexity and innovation been seen (Sepinwall, 2012). This new situation has been labelled television's Third Golden Age (Pérez Gómez, 2011) and has been referred to as a 'true modern extension of the imaginary construction model offered to the western world by the Hollywood film industry throughout the 20th century'² (Pérez, 2011, p. 13).

Though not the focus of this article, we can say that this new, revolutionary production model has created feverishness and activity in our society, not only has it taken the audio-visual markets by storm, it has also become a cross-media phenomenon (Bellón, 2012), appearing in blogs, webpages, social media, video-games, etc. We all attempt to comment on, understand and interpret this new audio-visual serialization.

Moreover, we are witnessing the apogee of the zombie³ (Martínez-Lucena, 2012), of which the series *The Walking Dead* is the most popular example in modern television serialization.⁴

According to the theory of social imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1987; Maffesoli, 2003; Appadurai, 2001; Taylor, 2004), both novelties in our cultural world—new TV series and the zeal for zombies—, appear to point to the series *The Walking Dead* as being the ideal setting in which to discover and describe the social imaginaries through which we manage the image we have of ourselves.

2 The translation is mine and it will be likewise in the following quoted texts whose originals are in Spanish in the bibliography.

3 We can find in the market: zombie dolls, apps which convert your pictures into zombie portraits, videogames about zombies, zombie bankers, zombie protesters, zombie cartoons, comics with super-heroes who transform themselves into their own zombie version, best-sellers about zombies or to resist the zombie outrage, blockbusters, etc. Our pop culture is nowadays in the middle of a blatant zombie invasion.

4 For example. *Dead Set* (2008), *The Returned* (2012-) or *In the flesh* (2013).

In this article, we attempt to show the social imaginary surrounding the human in this TV series based on the sociological theory applied to research on the media (González-Vélez, 2002; Imbert, 2008 & 2010).

Methodology

We will do this through the theoretical and hermeneutical exploration of the figure of the infected survivor, who appears in the comic *The Walking Dead*, of which the AMC series is an adaptation. This image of the infected will allow us to explore how the series has subconsciously introduced the attempt to address certain current debates surrounding the anthropological difference regarding other great apes.

We will begin our analysis by setting out the bases of the sociological theory of social imaginaries and their relation to myths in terms of post-modern fiction. We will then set out the narrative reach of the image of the infected, providing examples from various episodes of the first three seasons of *The Walking Dead*. Finally, we will explain, through Derridian thought, how the attempt to overcome the strictly naturalist and economic view of the human that is characteristic of our society is perceived in anthropological social imaginary.

Background to the concept of social imaginary

In contemporary western societies, which some have labelled *postmodern*, a series of changes has occurred that have conferred greater social relevance to the theory of social imaginaries. The state of anomy and disenchantment brought about by the decline of metanarratives and ideologies (Lyotard, 1984) has led to a need for mechanisms, distinct from those established in modern societies, in order for individuals to make sense of their lives.

As is well known, for a society to maintain its existence, it needs institutions that guarantee its unity. In this new society, without metanarratives, we need to identify new methods for obedience, which is only possible through the social legitimacy of power. It is no longer enough to have power; nowadays social recognition is needed in order to wield it effectively. It is

necessary that individuals consider it appealing and desirable to follow certain movements and dictates.

Furthermore, postmodern individuals need enchantment in their lives and are in search of a way of making sense of them that differs from the mere introduction of their narratives into higher linear social ones. As Imbert (2010) states:

In the face of the loss of *the real*—that which escapes reality—, the individual takes refuge in the imaginary—that which becomes reality; through a defect in language, the individual converts reality into *images of reality*. The excessive postmodern imaginary, a regime of visibility in which the image prevails over the word, has responded to the excessive symbolism in modern society, in which everything was represented, in which discourse imposed its order and language, its hegemony. (p. 89)

Thus, if our democratic societies have the imperative need to find reasons for social unity that not only differ from the ideological unity but are also freely chosen by the anomic individual, then social imaginaries represent a solution because of their sociogenic potential (Rivière, 1991). They are able to provide us with lenses that allow us to see without being seen and that favours a correct and authentic view of the world, while joining forces with those belonging to a society in its vision of what is real or unreal, normal or abnormal. As a preliminary definition, we could refer to the following:

By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes that people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. (Taylor, 2004, p. 23).

More concisely, we could say that social imaginaries are those socially constructed schemes that allow us to perceive something as real, to explain it and operationally act on what each system considers real (Pintos, 2002). These schemes, set of images and ways of imagining form part of

what has been termed the *noosphere* (Morin, 1998) or the *magma of imaginary meanings* (Castoriadis, 1984), which, in our mediatic and technological society, is multiplying and growing at an ever greater rate (Balandier, 1994): ‘There has been a shift in recent decades, building upon technological changes over the past century or so, in which imagination has become a collective social fact’ (Appadurai, 2003, p. 5).

In this magma of imaginary meanings, a continuous and confused process occurs of transformation, aggregation, fusion, inclusion, connection, separation etc. The imaginary takes form and creates myths that are but a crystallization of the imaginary, peculiar imaginary elaborations ‘in which this original religious impulse is veneered with a symbolic-cultural rationalization in which a bottomless abyss gives way to meaning’ (Carretero, 2006, p. 108).

Nevertheless, the variety of myths that populate our postmodern noosphere does not coincide with the idea of a founding myth whose sacred content articulates a society’s secular life. It is, rather, a plurality or conglomerate of micro-myths (Carretero, 2006) in continuous creation and recreation. From celebrities to football players via advertisements and video-clips, our culture of the masses would thus manage to ‘reintroduce the mythological into the heart of a highly secular society’ (Carretero, 2006, p. 123).

As Eliade states (1965), the rest of the mythical, degraded by modernity, will reappear camouflaged in western life always in connection with the hypertrophic technological and mediatic machine. With the invasion of the sacred by the secular, hierophanies begin to appear in the heart of our daily existence, our culture of the masses, always with the aim of re-enchanting our desacralized and disenchanting world (Ritzer, 2010) and of unleashing the myth’s identity and relational richness, the origin of which has been termed *postmodern neotribalism* (Maffesoli, 1996). Thus:

[...] the postmodern society has brought about the fragmentation of the single symbolic centre into a decentralized and *polymorphic* multiplication of symbolic centres blurred by everyday life. The *futurization of history* has given way to the conquering and reappropriation

of the present, *macromyths* that provided us with historical purposes [have given way] to fluctuating and precarious *micromyths* that, as a receptacle, embrace social identities that are *reunited* around the affective and the emotional. (Carretero, 2003, p. 89)

Thus, in postmodernity, “the legitimization of power is inseparable from this social function of the imaginary” (Carretero, 2003, p. 94) and mass media now plays the role that in the past was played by religion and political ideologies. As Balandier (1994) states: ‘The media has supplanted politics’ (p. 68).

In this respect, cinema, as has been demonstrated, it is the privileged agent of this re-enchantment of the world due to its inherent nature as the factory of dreams and a place of entertainment. Cinema allows the introduction of the imaginary into everyday life and allows dialogue between the real and unreal (Morin, 2005). Television enters into the recreational aspect of reality. That said, we understand that series, especially the current ones, which are as good as any of the best of Hollywood in terms of quality and execution, and which have a far greater impact than any individual film, are especially capable of modernising the two fundamental social functions of imaginaries in our society: the stabilising and the subversive, or revolutionary.

The roles of the micro-myths and the infected survivor

Returning to the sub-genre of the zombie, we immediately realise that it is a cultural abundance of micro-myths (Martínez-Lucena, 2010; Martínez-Lucena and Barryco, 2013).

The first function of the myth is what we term the *stabilising function*. Each micro-myth that makes up cultural products offers a ‘common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy’ (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). As we emotionally relate to these micro-myths, they become interwoven into the unperceived criterion of normality and abnormality that prevails in our societies.

On the other hand, what we have referred to as the subversive or revolutionary function is also present in the myth, which, emanating from the dynamism of the imaginary, takes a symbolic-cultural form born of a human desire to rebel against their natural destiny. It fights against rotteness, exorcism of death and temporal decomposition (Carretero, 2006, p. 111).

Therefore, micro-myths would allow rebellion and social change in the face of certain elements of reality that become unacceptable when compared to the new imaginaries.

The series *The Walking Dead* introduces a novel concept with regard to most of the zombie sub-genre. This concept is related to the new condition of the survivors: that of being uniformly infected. Nobody can avoid becoming a zombie. Whether they die through a bite, through accidental death, sickness or old age, they will all end up being a zombie like those they try to escape from day and night.

This is demonstrated on various occasions in the series (for example, 3.2 and 3.3). Rick Grimes, the protagonist, finds out at the end of the first season (1.6) without the audience realising until the second.

Thus, it is the survivors that are the focus of attention of Kirkman's comic and the TV series. As survivors, they are trapped on all sides: both from the outside (the apocalyptic world and the global plague of zombies) and from the inside (as a result of being infected). Their inevitable destiny is to become part of the horde, not only because of the size of the pandemic, but also because, in some respect, they are already zombies, as they behave in a predictable, calculable and inhuman way.

An example of this is Shane, who typifies the survival experienced by the human at the vilest level. Shane is a police officer, like the group's leader, Rick, and both have been friends since before the world became apocalyptic (1.1). Shane is in love with Rick's wife Lori. They had an affair when they thought Rick had died in the hospital where he had been admitted after having been shot before D day (1.2). However, when Rick reappears

(1.3), Lori goes back to him, while Shane attempts to look after her from a distance in the hope of regaining her affection. It is for this reason that when Carl, Rick and Lori's son, is injured by a shot fired accidentally by Otis (2.1), Shane offers to go with Otis in search of the antibiotics needed for Carl to survive the operation carried out by Dr Hershel Greene, a vet.

Once in the medical warehouse, surrounded by zombies, Shane kills Otis in order to save his own life and that of Carl, Lori's son, the person he considers the most important for his own purposes (2.2). Shane is a survivor who believes that the value of the human as somewhat subjective and that, now that civilization and the rules that govern it have fallen, only the fight for survival and the will to power of the nietzschean *übermensch* remain.

Shane is still human because, as we see at the beginning of the next episode, he is still in possession of a conscience and is tormented by the crime he has committed (2.3). Nevertheless, he hides his crime from the other survivors and shaves off his hair to hide the fact that Otis pulled out some of his hair before his death, symbolizing thus, in some way, the rebirth of his condition as a super-man, who is above good and evil. As such, he chooses to follow the path of inhumanity, which will soon lead him to have to confront Rick, to be stabbed to death, to become a zombie and die again as a zombie from a shot fired by Carl, Rick's son (2.12).

Nevertheless, there are distinct degrees of survival between humanity and animality. There are also different indicators of humanity in its broadest sense. One of these is hope. For example, in the episode titled TS-19 (1.6), a group of survivors has managed to get to the CDC (Centre for Disease Control), where they hope to find a solution to the zombie problem. There they find only one survivor, a scientist who leaves them in no doubt that they should not expect any answer to the global apocalypse from the world of science and who suggests mass suicide. When the countdown that will destroy the centre, with them in it, has already started, they start to discuss amongst themselves: Is it worth continuing or not?

The result is that some choose to stay and die, as they want to leave behind their empty, unbearable loneliness, while others choose to flee the

centre in search of the unknown. Thus, the group is polarized into those who have hope and those that do not. Or, rather, those who believe in hope and those that do not. Those that do, survive, whilst those that do not, choose to die. From that moment on, their hope against hope is constantly tested by circumstances that arise.

The idea of man as projected by these infected survivors is that of someone belonging to two opposing logics. On the one hand, s/he possesses all the classically human aspirations of happiness. On the other hand, s/he does not have any reasonable explanation or hypothesis as to how to achieve it. In this latter aspect, his/her life appears to be being dragged towards a sub-life, towards mere survival. Therefore, the survivor is someone who hopes for the impossible, as s/he desires something that s/he is unable to obtain, to identify, or to explain.

We believe that this is one of the reasons why this series has been so successful in a postmodern society in which individuals are noticeably headed toward their human aspirations, but in which the metanarratives, which aim to provide a way or answer to human desires, have been discredited. The postmodern individual, in this regard, is like a survivor, not only because he is in search of a meaning of life, as man has always been (MacIntyre, 1981), but also because he has become the seeker and generator of reference frameworks in which to create this meaning (Taylor, 1989).

For this same reason, the figure of the survivor appears, in his/her best version—aptly represented by Rick Grimes in the series—, as a typical and successful figure of postmodern fiction: the antihero (Hassan, 1961), who bears witness to a borderline anthropology (Imbert, 2010) typical of our era.

The series' audience lives in a world dominated by economic and scientific-technical narratives, along with the epistemology of the quantifiable, the measurable and the possible. The postmodern man knows himself through social imaginaries that reduce him to his corporality and his materiality (Castoriadis, 1984). However, this reduction of the human does not only occur at the level of the imaginary. Neither are the pieces of scientific

power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) which our society legitimizes, capable of distinguishing between man and his body.

Thus, our imaginaries of the human identify themselves with the naturalist photography of the body, generating certain conflict with one of the other typically modern imaginaries: authenticity, or fidelity to one's self (Taylor, 1991). On the one hand, we have the rationalists who seem to quantify the human according to a medical or scientific narrative that reduces us to a homeostatic state, or to chemical reactions. On the other, we need to be authentic, to be faithful to ourselves, to find ourselves, because there is something within us that is unfathomable and unique, different and irreducible.

Both the antihero and the infected survivor assimilate this ambivalence or contradiction into their existence. They are rebel-victims. They are victims because they do not live up to expectations and because they are measured both by social imaginary and the power/knowledge which prevail and scientifically or imaginarily describe human destiny: death. They are rebels because they do not yield to this measurement and have hope against hope, as they know themselves to be something distinct from what the prevailing narrative says of them but are incapable of saying exactly what they are. Only occasionally, through their appearance and their acts, do they attest to a difference between their foreseeable behaviour and their factual and eventual one. If the scientific and economic narratives establish what the possible is, these rebel-victims' way of moving hints at the impossible.

Thus, both the antihero and the infected survivor confirm the Foucaultian idea of the resistance to power as something that occurs within the same power relationships (Foucault, 1978), between which is, of course, our unavoidable relation with the scientific and economic power/knowledge, and with our own imaginaries.

In this way, it seems that it is the survivors' condition of being infected that opens up the possibility of the humanity of the survivor. This infection prevents the creation of an outside that distorts the survivor in order

to convert him/her into something purely human. If there is humanity, it has to appear in the quagmire that seems to deny it, in the apocalyptic situation as it appears to us.

Other features of the decay of the human in *The Walking Dead*

The zombie exists insofar that it devours the human according to the runaway consumer orality. This zombie infection of the survivor, this passive slide of his/her humanity towards his/her own extinction, is not only seen in the infected state of the survivors. Two other constants in this series confirm it: the resounding decline of the reference frameworks, which even leads us to doubt the taboos in which every civilization believes (Bataille, 1986) and the gradual erosion of the human as the series progresses.

The Walking Dead takes place in apocalyptic and dystopian scenarios that bring about the quarantining of the previous society's reference frameworks as the virus causing the infection spreads. In this context, we observe how a whole series of taboos, which form the foundations of cultures and allow them to cultivate the human, are questioned. Even in the attempts to civilize, such as those led by the governor of Holmville, some of these taboos are not respected (3.3 and following episodes). The survivor finds himself, therefore, in a regressive world that sees increasingly more cannibalism and incest, where the dead are not buried and where survivors even live with them, as in the case of the Governor, who keeps his converted daughter at home along with zombie heads that he keeps in fish tanks (3.7).

Besides this cultural transformation of the apocalyptic world, the survivors progressively lose their sense of the human through a lack of contact with structures, institutions or narratives that in the past guaranteed certain minimum standards of behaviour.

Such is the case when Rick, as the leader, sanctions the majority decision to execute a survivor who belongs to a criminal gang of survivors. The debate emerges between the humanity of western tradition, embodied by Dale (who dies in the same episode, thus symbolizing the disappearance of

the old North American democratic values), and this new regressive man represented by the survivor. The result is that they favour individual and collective life itself over that of another (2.11).

Thus, in the imaginary of the survivors, the human is portrayed as strictly material. Hence, for them, there is nothing more important than physical survival itself. If they do not even consider letting the prisoner live, it is because if they did so, they would risk their most treasured asset: survival itself. Thus, Dale's continuous calls to respect the dignity of every individual fall on deaf ears.

Despite the fact that they do not execute the young man, due to an *in extremis* decision taken by Rick, the group leader falls, once again, into a naturalist and utilitarian way of seeing the human on subsequent occasions. He does so, for example, when he cleaves the head of the leader of a group of prisoners in two with a machete because he tried to engineer Rick's death in a hand-to-hand fight with horde of zombies. Moreover, shortly after, Rick forces the captive's accomplice to face a large group of zombies unarmed, thus making it almost impossible for him to escape and knowing that, as such, he will most probably die (3.2).

Thus, it seems that a glimmer of humanity is seen in the survivor.

A way out of the labyrinth of the human

The scenario described thus far resonates with the viewer, who quickly identifies with the infected state of the survivor. In our everyday lives we seem to be absorbed by a certain calculated judgement vis-à-vis reality that appears similar to the survivor's often cynical, economic perspective. And the worst aspect of this outlook is that it resonates with our powerful social imaginaries, which tend to reinforce it in line with the previously mentioned stabilising role of the social imaginaries.

Nevertheless, the infected state of humanity as portrayed by *The Walking Dead* does not imply a *tout court* assimilation of the human by the zombie. Despite all this, we see moments of great humanity amongst the survivors

in which they are capable of transgressing the dictates of the cold naturalist, economic and utilitarian imaginaries which seem to move them towards their own dehumanization through calculation. Thus, we also discern a certain subversiveness vis-à-vis the naturalist anthropological *status quo* in the series' representation of the human. The image of the infected not only includes that of the zombie, but also that of humanity in its most mysterious and authentic sense, not merely its biological meaning.

If we understand humanity as a concept to be explained according to the behavioural phenomenology of the infected as described so far, I believe it could be helpful to turn to the unconditional ethics as viewed by Derrida. Throughout his works, the French philosopher extensively details the so-called unconditional ethics, including the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, friendship, democracy, innovation, etc. (Di Martino, 2011).

Derrida shows us that humanity resists the theorization of the logocentric perspective with which we tend to reduce reality. Humanity is an event. In other words, it cannot be reduced to its condition of possibility, as all events point to a certain unpredictability of that which happens (Borradori, 2003). An event is 'unique, unforeseeable, without horizon of waiting, without theological maturity, an oak without acorn' (Derrida, 1997, p. 41).

Thus, there would be two humanities existing side by side in the survivor: that described by natural science and the event; the zombie (the economy of the human) and the human. It could be said that the zombie is the man who is not recreated, in whom a new beginning is not possible, impossible, like an invention, because if natural science were to rule, there would be no true innovation (Derrida, Sussana, & Nouss, 2006).

Thus, if humanity occurs, it is impossible in the same way an invention is. Humanity, if it exists, would be an event, something which is especially present in what Derrida calls the *unconditional ethics*. The formula chosen by Derrida to explain these unconditional ethics is 'if there is any' (Derrida, 2005, p. 287). He says, for example, that the gift, *if there is any*, is impossible. However, he does not mean by this that it could not be given (Derrida, 1999).

The unconditional ethic is symptomatic of the human. Therefore, whichever this may be, whether it is the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, democracy, if there is any, it is impossible. And each one of us should examine our own experience to know if there is any or if there is not. Forgiveness, for example, if there is any, is impossible because if we think about it or even look at it, we see that someone pardons somebody for something. There is a motive behind the pardon and, therefore, a calculation, an economy that describes a circle of exchange between the pardoner and the pardoned. Thus, once the motive behind the pardon is established and with it the economy of the pardon, we see how this same pardon vanishes, as there is only forgiveness if there is gratuity, since forgiveness means, etymologically speaking, *extremely free*, that is, superlative gratuity.

Thus, we can establish that there is only forgiveness when the unpardonable is pardoned, because by only pardoning the unpardonable would the economic reduction of the act of pardoning being avoided, since by pardoning the unpardonable we would not be capable of rationally reducing the act of pardoning itself. There is no motive powerful enough to pardon the unpardonable. However, at the same time, we see how pardoning the unpardonable is logical yet linguistically impossible as the unpardonable is precisely that which cannot be pardoned. Therefore, it is evident that forgiveness, if there is such a thing, is impossible. In other words, if one were to experience that forgiveness, one would experience something impossible; that is, one would experience an event of our humanity, which is mysterious or, as Derrida would say, secret (Derrida and Ferraris, 2001). Thus, the motive of this forgiveness defended by Derrida is not logocentric or rationalist, or pure light, but coexists with the dark, the mysterious, the secret, to which it is indebted since it is made possible by the impossibility of reduction that is the secret.

Having made this brief incursion into the Derridian *aporetologic* thought⁵, we can now analyse certain features of the infected humanity seen in the survivors in *The Walking Dead* with the aim of demonstrating the

5 Derrida defines his thought as “the aporetology or aporetography in which I have not ceased to struggle” (Derrida, 1993, p.15).

revolutionary element within this series in terms of a naturalistic anthropological vision that is characteristic of our society. Humanity as presented in *The Walking Dead* is irreducible at certain moments in which the humanity of the survivors is witnessed. An illustration of this is T-Dog, one of the least important members of the group of survivors. He dies trying to save Carol from being bitten by one of the zombies. In one scene, we see how one of the prisoners they find in the prison in which they shelter lets in a large group of zombies into the compound. Some of the survivors attempt to escape from the zombies sheltering inside one of the blocks. A battle ensues, but the survivors are outnumbered. T-Dog is bitten in the back while closing a gate to protect Maggie. T-Dog and Carol get separated from the rest of the group but continue their flight. They are soon surrounded and T-Dog offers himself as bait in order to lure the zombies away from Carol, who has time to escape. In doing so, he displays an act of humanity that cannot be reduced to an exchange economy or survival (3.5).

In the next episode (3.6), we witness a dialogue between Glenn and Hershel, two of T-Dog's companions who are profoundly upset over his death and talk about the way in which he gives his life in order to save his friends.

We also see this irreducibility of the human to a calculation of survival in Lori and her unwanted pregnancy. Not only does she not want to bring a child into this apocalyptic world, but she is not entirely certain whether the father is Shane or Rick, and, furthermore, Hershel has asked the whole group to leave the farm, thus leaving them unprotected.

In the episode titled 'Secrets', we see how Dale takes Lori to one side to talk to her alone, since Glenn has told him that she is expecting a baby. She confides in him her decision not to tell her husband and to have an abortion. She asks Glenn to go in search of some abortion pills, which he does. She takes them, but a little later regrets her decision and makes herself sick to bring them up. Shortly after she steps out of the tent to think things over, Rick enters and finds the abortion pills on the floor. He storms out to look for Lori and on finding her they start arguing. She ends up admitting to him what has happened and she tells him that, despite deciding to go

ahead and have the baby, she does not want to give birth in a hole without being able to guarantee her child a minimum of security (2.6).

Nevertheless, Lori finally gives birth not in a ditch but under siege in a dark cell, along with her son Carl and her companion Maggie, having been chased there by a horde of zombies. As if this was not enough, the birth is difficult and Lori ceases to be the person defined by circumstances or by her own calculating ways, and does not hesitate to ask Maggie, Hershel's daughter and the group's vet-cum-doctor, to carry out a caesarean even though she knows that this will result in her death. The same person who used to be determined by circumstances and by survival is no longer defined by these, and chooses the impossible: to say yes to the gift of life itself and the life of her child, beyond any economy of survival, thereby demonstrating a living humanity and not a calculated or zombie humanity (3.4).

Humanity is condensed, thus, in people or moments that reveal the possibility of the impossible and demonstrate, to those who witness their humanity, that living another way is a real possibility. Humanity is something that is also contagious, spreading amongst the survivors. This can be seen clearly in Rick's eulogy at the funeral for Dale, who was the only one to clearly see the humanity of every man as indebted to infinite respect (2.12). Curiously, Rick's words are superimposed over images in which the survivors are seen venting their fury by massacring zombies. It is as if Dale urges them to fight against this zombie infection dwelling inside them. The zombie simply reflects Man's eagerness to devour the human, to economically consume it, thus reducing it to a bolus, while the human, in some respects impossible for being inexplicable, endures in the survivors, where it confronts the impoverished alien humanity in the form of the zombie.

Conclusion

In this article, we have demonstrated how the micro-myth represented by the series *The Walking Dead* introduces into our imaginaries a subversive image of humanity through the figure of the infected survivor. In other words, we have attempted to show how certain images in *The Walking Dead* could be

extremely alternative with regard to the quantitatively defined image of the human that prevails in our societies.

Furthermore, we have contributed to the theory of imaginaries a practical case study of a successful television series, thus opening the way for further research that will allow us to create a map of the social imaginaries that are fed by contemporary television seriality, to which they owe much.

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