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## ZOMBIE 2.0: SUBJECTIVATION IN TIMES OF APOCALYPSE

### A ZOMBIFIED CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

In recent times, the zombie has been celebrated as the “official monster of our Great Recession.”<sup>1</sup> From the allegories and metaphors employed by different cultural theorists to describe neoliberal economics,<sup>2</sup> to the wave of protesters who dressed as zombies to couple their explicit political discontent with a specific aesthetic figuration,<sup>3</sup> the zombie aesthetic imaginary appears to have saturated many cultural and political discussions.<sup>4</sup>

The relatively recent return of the zombie in various forms of media seems to mark a high point in its history – from the revival of the zombie theme in cinema productions since the beginning of the new millennium, to the increased number of TV series, comic books, and videogames on the same ‘undead’ topic. The horde of the undead has admittedly infected our collective imagination. As reported by Richard Seymour on his *Lenin’s Tomb* blog, during the riots in London in August 2011 many witnesses affirmed: “it’s like *28 Days Later* out there.”<sup>5</sup> Following the example offered by the director Zack Snyder in his 2004 remake of George Romero’s seminal *Dawn of the Dead*, it has apparently become easy to associate images of public urban disorders with the feeling of uncontrollable chaos with which many zombie narratives begin.

However, besides the repetitiveness of this trope in cultural, political, and economic debates, this article will argue that the critical potential of the figure of the walking dead has not been investigated thoroughly enough. The figure of the zombie could be further employed as a way of understanding our subjective position under a politico-economic framework dominated by neoliberal economics. This critical potential can be found in the relation between the metaphor of the zombie – considered here as referring to a

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Farnell, “The Current Conjuncture and Its Monsters” (presented at the “Zombosium,” University of Winchester, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Chris Harman, *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010); and David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> In 2011, the members of the movement Occupy Wall Street dressed up as zombies to protest against corporate greed before, during, and after the financial crash in 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Hardie, “The Demise of Zombie Politics,” accessed March 27, 2014, <http://blogs.crikey.com.au/northern/2012/02/27/where-governments-reign-but-dont-govern-the-demise-of-zombie-politics/>.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Seymour, “A Crisis of Ideology and Political Leadership,” *Lenin’s Tomb*, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.leninology.com/2011/08/crisis-of-ideology-and-political.html?m=0>.

determinate political subjectivation – and the representation of the end of the world so common in these narratives.<sup>6</sup>

The central tenet of this article is that one of the most common tropes in zombie narratives is to take the end of the world for granted or as inevitable. The kinds of narratives that share this stance are relevant because of the different ways humanity crawls towards the “end of times,” either through the depiction of a return to small community bonding or variations on the Hobbesian war “of every man against every man.”<sup>7</sup> If we take ‘zombification’ as a metaphor for a particular kind of subjectivation of contemporary Western capitalism – as with the director George Romero, the ‘godfather’ of the zombie subgenre with his fundamental first zombie trilogy, but also with the contemporary variation represented by the fast zombie – this sense of eschatological inevitability seems to suggest that the current economic and political subjectivation is something to be acknowledged as unavoidable.

Is this really the case? In our perception of the End through zombie narratives, who interprets the role of “us”? Are we the zombie subjectivized by neoliberalism? And what kind of zombies are we? Or are we the humans who try futilely to escape the living dead? And if so, how do we relate to the inescapable apocalyptic walking hoard of undead and the actual subjects zombies allegorically represent?

Alongside the representation of the end of the world, and in order to answer these questions, this article will focus on the increased speed of zombies’ movements witnessed in the past fifteen years. As a metaphor of a particular economic and cultural conjuncture, this increased speed will be read through the lens of Michel Foucault’s analysis of neoliberal economics and its strong emphasis on the responsibility of the individual worker. By following the linkage between neoliberalism and a specific production of subjectivities, the final section will outline a twofold argument: first, for the acceptance and necessary politicization that one is knowingly “living at the end of times,”<sup>8</sup> second, for the positive utilization of the new peculiarities of subjectivities forged by the rationale behind contemporary neoliberalism.

#### AN ONGOING APOCALYPSE

Compared to other narratives of the monstrous – such as those depicting vampires, werewolves, and so on – the modern zombie narrative can be characterized by its particular relationship with the representation of the

<sup>6</sup> In this article, the use of the concept of “subjectivation” is drawn from Michel Foucault’s notion of power as a struggle between different forces and his specific conception of a subject (or a subjectivity) produced “positively” and not in terms of negation, lack, prohibition, and ban as previously thought by classical psychoanalysis and certain branches of Marxism. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who was extensively influenced by Foucault’s conception of power and subjectivity, perfectly summarizes the meaning of “subjectivation.” As he argued in a conversation with Claire Pernet in 1986: “There is no subject *per se*, but a production of subjectivity: subjectivity must be produced at the right moment, precisely because there is no subject.” Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparler: 1972-1990*, trans. Stefano Verdicchio (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2000), 152, [my translation].

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 185.

<sup>8</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso Books, 2011).

apocalypse.<sup>9</sup> As is often the case, when the zombie outbreak occurs (for whatever reasons), it is safe to assume that the narrative conveys a feeling of a world which is coming to an end, both in the form of the end of our Western way of life and the more literal and 'natural' end of human life as we know it. This arguably echoes the specter which constantly haunts most political theory: the return to a hypothetical state of nature from which an (as yet to be determined) form of political government must be found.

The most powerful openings of zombie narratives place their main characters *in media res*, when the process of zombification of the world has already started. The zombie outburst is already happening whether the characters – as well as the spectators/readers/videogame players of these narratives – know it or not. It is possible to detect an impression of incomprehension about the manifest random chaos witnessed in these opening scenes, which is promptly replaced by the awareness that "zombies are walking on the earth" and there is nothing that will stop them.<sup>10</sup>

In relation to such a typical setting of eschatological inescapability, it is worth mentioning the closing scenes of Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead*. Here the spectator is faced with footage from a videotape. Unexpectedly placed at the end of the movie, and more precisely integrated with the end credits, the footage appears to work as the happy ending to the story. It follows the journey of the main characters, escaping the overrun mainland by yacht, before they eventually reach an island. Yet, it only takes a few seconds for this alleged happy ending to be transformed into a repetition of the same eschatological setting with which Snyder opened his movie. In fact, the island has already been infested by zombies – the contagion was faster than the group's journey to the island and the zombies were too fast to flee from. A character who has been filming as they disembark is forced to drop the digital camera on the dock, and from that moment onwards the idle camera shows the hopeless attempts of the group to resist the approaching hoard of the undead.

As Max Brooks puts it in his *Zombie Survival Guide*, "the science of ending life, developed and perfected since the beginning of our existence, cannot protect us from an enemy that has no 'life' to end."<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that in every zombie narrative the human survivors simply stop resisting a swarming horde of the undead – for there would be no zombie narrative at all if it was not for the constant tension between the survival instinct of the main characters and the approaching zombie plague – but rather that every attempt of the 'survivalists' is merely an indefinite deferral of a dreaded and

<sup>9</sup> With "modern zombie narrative" I refer to most of the zombie narratives that emerged as a result of George Romero's "...dead" series after the 1960s. Before Romero, the zombie was connoteed by a different kind of representation, heavily influenced by its Haitian origins, which for the lack of space I cannot fully explore in this article.

<sup>10</sup> Besides the already mentioned 2004 version of *Dawn of the Dead*, striking examples of eschatological zombie outbreak can be found in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) and the main character Jim (Cillian Murphy)'s walk through a London devastated by the "rage virus" epidemic, or in the first episode of AMC's TV series *The Walking Dead*, in which the protagonist Rick (Andrew Lincoln) finds his way out from the hospital in which he had been staying when the "walkers" plague spread.

<sup>11</sup> Max Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead* (London: Duckworth, 2004), xiii.

inevitable end. Whatever the reasons these narratives employ to justify the end of the world – be it the explosion of a probe returning from Venus, the ‘zombification’ quality of the living dead’s bite, or contagion from a deadly virus – there never appears to be a possibility for real salvation. As Drezner points out, “the undead menace usually goes global in the zombie canon.”<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, the modern zombie narrative poignantly represents the moment in which the world’s ‘normal’ state of affairs comes to a halt. It rarely explains the causes of the zombie outbreak, nor is it particularly concerned about the post-apocalyptic reshaping of a new world order, with a few exceptions.<sup>13</sup> As Lauro and Embry point out in their “Zombie Manifesto,” the figure of the zombie cannot offer any catharsis, but rather stands as the cause of the destruction of the reigning model.<sup>14</sup> In other words, it is an apocalypse without a revelation “out of which we regroup and attempt to rebuild.”<sup>15</sup>

If the value of zombie narratives can be found in the assumption that all the negative elements of bourgeois capitalist society are corrupt and ultimately need to be destroyed – as this article will argue – then it must be also noted that zombie fiction is also about reconstructing and rebuilding bourgeois family values. As the majority of post-Romero zombie narratives displays, the poor, the black, the lower middle-classes, are all caught up in the urban disorder following the spread of the zombie epidemic infection, usually making up the bulk of the initial zombie hordes. Kirkman, Moore, and Adlard’s comic book *The Walking Dead* (2003-) – and the successful AMC’s television series of the same name (2010-) – perfectly portrays the attempt of survivors to re-create the family (or community-like) bonds which held them together before the catastrophe. It could be argued that in these fictions there seems to be a constant tension between a nihilistic desire for the existing social and political order to end and a defense of (through repetition of the same) bourgeois family values.<sup>16</sup>

Apocalypse haunts every generation without exception. Nuclear disaster, millennial second-coming, world war, aliens – just to mention some – have always been represented in diverse media and cultural products. But why is the end of the world, considered through the zombie figure, such a recurrent discursive category in contemporary cultural analyses? Before answering the question about this new actualization of the eschatological theme, it is important to understand how the zombie can be read as the metaphor, allegory, or figuration of a specific socio-economic framework which this cultural figure stems from.

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel W. Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 15.

<sup>13</sup> As in Max Brooks, *World War Z* (London: Duckworth, 2007), the *Resident Evil* film series, and Juan Carlos Fresnadillo’s movie *28 Weeks Later* (2007).

<sup>14</sup> “[The zombie] seeks to transfer its burden, but the result is only a multiplication of its condition: no zombie body is relieved of its condition by passing it on. Therefore the zombie once again deters the possibility of catharsis.” S. J. Lauro and K. Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism,” *Boundary 2* 35, no. 1 (2008): 100.

<sup>15</sup> Evan Calder Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* (Ropley: Zero Books, 2011), 85.

<sup>16</sup> In relation to this last point, I have to thank J.D. Taylor for his feedback on an early draft of this article.

#### *WE ARE THE WALKING DEAD*

George Romero's groundbreaking new representation of the zombie as one of the gruesome symptoms of modern capitalism – both in the forms of social critique of class and race (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968) and an explicit attack to the dangers of a mass consumer culture (*Dawn of the Dead*, 1978) – initiated a fruitful tradition of zombie narratives relatively intertwined with critiques of the established capitalist order.<sup>17</sup> Differing from other figures that inhabit the realm of popular culture, Drezner argues that "Zombies possess a patina of plausibility that vampires, ghosts, witches, demons, or wizards lack; the creation of a zombie does not necessarily require a supernatural act."<sup>18</sup>

Romero once stated that "the zombie films are what I perceive as my platform, a pulpit. They have given me an opportunity to at least, not necessarily express opinions or criticize, but observe what's going on in society."<sup>19</sup> Romero is quite explicit in considering the zombie films he makes as being fictional metaphors to represent his perception of contemporary society. Over the years, critics have read Romero's movies as an allegory of the tumultuous social climate of the 1960s America – especially in *Night of the Living Dead*. Further, the two sequels – *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* (1985) – have been read as critiques of capitalism, racism, and American involvement in conflicts abroad, by scholars from a variety of theoretical backgrounds.<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, the zombie becomes a privileged tool for the analysis of contemporary society, because it appears to represent the kind of political and economic subject produced by political and economic tendencies in determinate periods of our history. More precisely, as a metaphor for our contemporary times, the zombie is the result of a process of subjectivation. For Romero, the zombie was a product of a certain kind of economic framework taking shape from the 1960s. For example, in *Dawn of the Dead*, zombies gather and endlessly wander around different shops as a result of memory patterns of their previous state as living humans remaining attracted to one of the most powerful symbols of the American consumerist culture –

<sup>17</sup> Evan Calder Williams, in his brilliant *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, argues that the socio-political critique offered by the zombie narrative has disappeared since the 1990s, following the first wave of modern zombie narratives. Although his argument is well grounded, especially in relation to the critical intentions of the authors of zombie narratives – to a certain extent, zombie movies after 2000 are far less 'political' than their predecessors – it can be argued that the critical political potential of contemporary zombie narratives stems out of a different approach to the zombie as a subject (post-subject, or non-subject). The dynamic of recognition between the spectator and the zombie narrative has changed, and something like an identification with the new zombie would be necessary, instead of always getting caught in the readymade reading of the massified consumerist zombie, which arguably belongs to an older stage of capital's development of its form.

<sup>18</sup> Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*, 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Terence McSweeney, "The Land of the Dead and the Home of the Brave: Romero's Vision of a Post-9/11 America," in *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the "War on Terror,"* ed. Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, and Karen Randell (New York: Continuum, 2010), 107.

<sup>20</sup> Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*, 4–5; and Kim Paffenroth, *Gospel of the Living Dead: George Romero's Visions of Hell on Earth* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006).

the shopping mall. In this way, one could argue that Romero was trying to warn his spectators about the state of hypnosis caused by the intense regime of mass-production and consumption of commodities, encouraged by corporations. The typical sluggishness of Romero's undead reproduced the uniformity and massification of the majority of the Western population, half-hypnotized by TV and by consumer culture. In this regard, Romero's critique was, and remains, overtly political.

For Romero (and others), the zombie is always a result, never a cause. Fredric Jameson's concept of a cultural "political unconscious" faced with the challenges of the metamorphoses of capitalism, is helpful here.<sup>21</sup> Referring to Romero's zombie movies, Steve Beard points out that "if the methodology of Fredric Jameson is adopted and the [zombie] film . . . is treated as a 'dream-text' with a political unconscious buried beneath a layer of critical defense-mechanisms, then it is possible to see that the zombie is a figure of an expanding post-Fordist under-class filtered through a bourgeois imaginary of disgust."<sup>22</sup>

Beard's is one among the many approaches to zombie narratives. Conversely, Evan Calder Williams' argument about zombie's connection with the world (and the subjects) they allegorically represent – in terms both of an economic 'totality' and the process of subjectivation generated by it – appears to be more relevant for the purposes of this article. Williams argues that the zombie figure projects its analytic potential in a twofold way. On the one hand, it relates to the apocalyptic meaning of "revelation of the hidden," namely, the abstraction of capital and its constant metamorphoses. As he puts it:

What is apocalyptic about the walking dead is what they reveal about the conditions of the *living*, all those deep, rutted grooves of antagonism and violence seething beneath daily life. The open secrets of an economic totality, at once the violence of abstraction (the consequences of shifting patterns of valuation) and the abstraction of violence (this is just business, folks, nothing personal).<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, this analytical potential emerges in the ways in which zombies relate to the subjects they represent *through* their relation to what caused their zombified state – read with the aid of a methodology close to what Jameson once defined "cognitive mapping"<sup>24</sup> – for "they are the thought of *how real abstractions work on real bodies*."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Steve Beard, *Aftershocks: The End of Style Culture* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 78.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (August 1984): 89; and Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 346–60.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, 80.

Here, Williams is referring especially to zombie narratives based on zombie epidemics that do not necessarily spread *via* bodily fluids – saliva with bites, blood, and so on – but rather by a general viral condition that affects the dead and the living alike. A good example of this typology of generalized contagion can be found in Robert Kirkman's comic book series *The Walking Dead*, in which the main character, the police officer Rick Grimes, discovers that the “roamers” infection affects not only the humans bitten by zombies, but anyone who died after the living dead outbreak. In the twenty-fourth issue of the comic book, Rick exclaims: “We’re surrounded by the dead. We’re among them – and when we finally give up we become them! We’re living borrowed time here . . . You think we hide behind walls to protect us from *the walking dead!* – Don’t you get it? WE ARE THE WALKING DEAD! We are the walking dead.”<sup>26</sup>

Further, both Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* made explicit this link one finds in many recent zombie narratives. In a scene from the third movie in Romero’s trilogy, a human character simply affirms “they’re us” referring to the horde of the undead.

It is in this sense that zombification – or more precisely the process of subjectivation by zombie contagion – has on the one hand an overt connection with the world which produced that particular cultural figuration, and on the other hand is inextricably linked to the feeling of a precise unavoidable (and never-ending) apocalypse caused by the metamorphosis of the capitalist framework.

This leads us back to an earlier question of this article. Seen under the lens of the zombie narrative, why is eschatology regaining its strength as a category of cultural and political analysis? If “[z]ombies, like all things that are feared, are the products of the culture that shapes them and bear within their myths the imprint of existing social conditions,” this means that every change in the existing condition constitutes the basis of new peculiarities within zombie narratives.<sup>27</sup> The model of capitalism in the 1960s and the 1970s – with Romero’s zombies as its symptoms – relied on different ideological assumptions compared to the post-Fordist neoliberal model emerging after 1979 – represented in zombie narratives of the last fifteen years both by a more solid connection with the fear of the apocalypse and with the increased speed of the zombies.

#### ZOMBIE 2.0: A DROMOLOGICAL SUBJECTIVATION

Kim Paffenroth argued that Tom Savini’s remake of Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* is “too identical to the original to need further comment.”<sup>28</sup> Conversely, one of the things that distinguishes Snyder’s remake is an important change in the physical capacities of the zombies. In the last ten years we have witnessed something in zombie movies that had never been seen before: zombies have started to run. Their usual slow shuffling has turned, in Snyder and others’ interpretations of the zombie narrative, into a

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Kirkman, Charlie Adlard, and Cliff Rathburn, *The Walking Dead*. Vol. 4: *The Heart’s Desire* (Berkeley: Image Comics, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Lauro and Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto,” 100.

<sup>28</sup> Paffenroth, *Gospel of the Living Dead*, 2.

frenetic run towards the living. In a recent book on popular culture after 9/11, Anna Froula lucidly describes this new category of zombie when she affirms that since Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), the living dead have shifted from being "lurching ghouls to adrenaline-filled berserkers."<sup>29</sup> It is this notion of physiological metamorphosis of the undead, in relation to their increased speed of movement, which constitutes the central focus of this section.

After *28 Days Later*, it is speed, not class or ethnicity, which is the trait that might provide an alternative understanding of the political relevance of the zombie. If Romero's zombie hoard is the counterpart to the general image the director himself had of American culture – in political and economic terms – how are we to understand the increased speed of the living dead? Can we consider this increased speed as anything other than a symptom of a generalized anxiety about the kind of speed the *homo œconomicus* must adopt in order to survive the neoliberal market?

As previously mentioned, the first manifestation of the fast zombie can be traced back to Boyle's *28 Days Later*. Although not technically zombies – for they were the result of a synthetic biological contagion known as the "rage virus" – the running infected living dead in this movie started a trend regarding the new enhanced speed of zombies. In fact, this new fast type of zombie can also be found in Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead*, the English TV series *Dead Set* (2008), the *Resident Evil* trilogy, *Le Horde* (2009), *Zombieland* (2009), *Rammbock: Berlin Undead* (2010), and in *World War Z* (2013) based on Max Brooks' novel of the same name.<sup>30</sup> In these movies, the walking dead become the running dead. It sounds like an oxymoron, especially if we follow Max Brook's tutorial for surviving the living dead: "Zombies appear to be incapable of running. The fastest have been observed to move at a rate of barely one step per 1.5 seconds."<sup>31</sup> However, the new breed of zombies runs fast. Extremely fast. Moreover, these zombies' level of dangerousness has increased alongside their speed. One could argue that zombies have undergone a dromological paradigm shift. The new zombies can be characterized by a dromological acceleration of their movements.<sup>32</sup>

Dromology is a concept developed by the French philosopher and cultural theorist Paul Virilio at the end of the 1970s. The word comes from the Greek *dròmos*, translated in English as "race" or "race course." Virilio often described his concept of dromology as a discourse on speed and, more precisely, dromology is the science, the discipline, the logic of speed. The first systematic use of the concept can be found in *Speed and Politics*, originally

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<sup>29</sup> Anna Froula, "Prolepsis and the 'War on Terror': Zombie Pathology and the Culture of Fear in *28 Days Later...*," in *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the "War on Terror,"* ed. Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, and Karen Randell (New York: Continuum, 2010), 197.

<sup>30</sup> "In *Zombieland*, the undead spread because they were faster than the aerobically challenged Americans." Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> For a compelling analysis of the relation between the increased speed of zombies and revolutionary politics, see Gastón Gordillo, "World Revolution Z," *Space and Politics*, accessed February 12, 2014, <http://spaceandpolitics.blogspot.ca/2012/12/world-revolution-z.html>.

published in 1977.<sup>33</sup> In this work, Virilio argues that the history of humanity can be understood only insofar as we focus on the technological progress made possible through the militarization of society.<sup>34</sup> One of the most important arguments in Virilio's book is that the militarization of society should be analysed through the study of the speed of the weapons employed. The passage from the feudal system (and its fortified cities) to the capitalist system (and the development of ballistic weapons like projectiles) is symptomatic of the way speed becomes a category worthy of investigation. Accordingly, Virilio affirms that it is speed – not class or wealth – that is the primary motor behind the advancement of civilization.

If the slow speed of Romero's zombies mirrored the process of subjectivation under consumer culture after the 1960s, the increased speed of the new zombie is the figuration for a new dromological subjectivation, a different process for the formation of subjectivities. The new generation of zombies is functioning as an allegory and a metaphor for a new kind of economic subject. This new subject is no longer zombified – in other words, subjectivized – as a passive subject of the market, but rather it is created to respond to the new needs of neoliberal capitalism. This is what I call the Zombie 2.0, in contrast to the crawling Zombie 1.0 which was related to the previous Fordist model of capitalist production.

Michel Foucault outlined the formation of the neoliberal economic discourse in his lectures at the Collège de France in 1978, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.<sup>35</sup> In these lectures, Foucault expands his research on the genealogy of power he started in the first part of the 1970s. The study of the mechanisms of security, in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, opened paths for research about the birth of the economic discipline of liberalism.<sup>36</sup> The lectures in *The Birth of Biopolitics* expose the extent to which neoliberal economics changed the way the economic subject was not only perceived, but also constructed.

According to Foucault, the first American neoliberals (in the 1930s) argued that classical political economy left unexplored the field of labour. Besides Adam Smith's "first opening" towards a reflection on labour as the key to develop his economic theory, labour "has remained, in a way, a blank sheet on which the [classical] economists have written nothing."<sup>37</sup> The American neoliberals pointed to the extent to which previous classical liberal economists studied labour only as a part of the big machine of capital – that is, the conception of labour as an entity between capital and the process of production. For the American neoliberals, continues Foucault, "classical political economy has never analyzed labor itself, or rather it has constantly striven to neutralize it, and to do this by reducing it exclusively to the factor of time."<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, as Foucault shows, neoliberal economists study the internal rationalities of the workers when they are on the market. In

<sup>33</sup> Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 219.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 220.

doing this, the position of the worker is conceived in a completely different manner. Neoliberal economics formulates its discourse from the point of view of the worker. For the first time in economic analyses, the worker is no longer assumed to be an object – an object of demand and an object of offer in the form of labour force – but she becomes an active economic subject. According to Foucault, the *homo economicus* of classical political economy, within neoliberalism, assumes the form of an enterprise, or more precisely, an entrepreneur of herself – inciting each individual to take the form of “human capital.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, abstracting labour further into human resources can be argued to have meant that labour was conceived as a machine, a drive, something that scientific (and social) engineering and intervention could make more productive.

In Foucault’s reading of neoliberal economics, the concept of human capital is constituted by innate and acquired elements. The acquired elements of human capital are factors that become economically relevant within neoliberalism, such as education, professional skills, and mobility. The new active subject of the neoliberal market can be effective only insofar as she performs a series of investments in acquired human capital. In other words, contemporary neoliberal framework forces the worker to create, as soon as possible, an adequate level of employability.<sup>40</sup> According to the Italian philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato, the aim of neoliberal economics is to create a vast array of self-entrepreneurs who keep the level of competition high. This in turn generates an atmosphere of what he calls “equal inequality.”<sup>41</sup> As well, Lazzarato demonstrates that one of the strategies of neoliberal economics has been to construct a new economic subject such as the “new poor” – that is, the proletarianized middle class that is often placed in the general category of “precarious workers.” In these categories, Lazzarato suggests, fear runs along the whole continuum.<sup>42</sup> These subjects are created in order to render the mechanisms of competition and precariousness even harsher. As such, neoliberal capitalism has its own devices (or *dispositifs*) for social control.<sup>43</sup>

If we follow Foucault and Lazzarato’s analyses of neoliberal economics, it becomes evident that, as in zombie movies from the beginning of the third millennium, the worker has undergone a dromological paradigm shift as well. The worker must now actively invest in her human capital, for the neoliberal market can be sustained only by the circulation created by the investment and mobility of its workers. Today, the worker as an entrepreneur of herself is required to be fast and adaptable to the constantly changing requests of the neoliberal market.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 224–26.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 227–28.

<sup>41</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 109–33.

<sup>42</sup> For a compelling account of the extent to which contemporary regimes of ‘mobility’ and precariousness affect daily life, see Ivor Southwood, *Non-Stop Inertia* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> A more critical analysis of Foucault’s reading of neoliberalism in *The Birth of Biopolitics* can be found in Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*, trans. J. D. Jordan (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012).

Through his concept of dromology, Virilio argued that the categories of space and time have become relative to the new absolute of speed.<sup>44</sup> With modern technologies, speed becomes the only constant to the detriment of the relevance of physical space. In relation to any kind of movement, more than the spatial coordinates of departure and arrival, what is important is the speed of the trajectory. According to Virilio, in the new framework of modernity, Newtonian time and space have been relativized by the absolutization of speed. The route has the upper hand over the object. In the same way, neoliberalism creates and privileges the trajectories of workers, their mobility. This mobility need not be only a spatial mobility – for example when different flows of workers migrate towards more favourable economies<sup>45</sup> – but also be reflected in the level of employability related to the acquired human capital. The movies featuring fast zombies registered a paradigm shift in the formation of subjectivities. As it was in the case of Romero's movies, these kinds of zombie narratives can be said to function in our society as a (renewed) political unconscious.

#### *THE POLITICIZATION OF SPEED AND ESCHATOLOGY*

As we have seen, *Zombie 2.0* narratives, depict zombie epidemics from which it is impossible to escape alive. The entire world must end up zombified. Working as a kind of collective cultural death-drive, the enjoyment of our own demise as aesthetic spectacle is brutally displayed. Returning to the comparison between the process of zombification and formation of subjectivities, this article has argued that the sense of eschatological inevitability in these movies seems to suggest that the contemporary economical and political subjectivation is something to be acknowledged as inevitable. Neoliberalism shapes our subjectivities according to its aims. This sense of inevitability is one of the tropes which might clarify why the zombie – and the actual subjects zombies allegorically represent – has often been thought of as a product of an overarching economical base, both with Romero's slow zombies, and the fast *Zombie 2.0*. But if that is the case, what is the critique established by the *Zombie 2.0*?

The critique of the *Zombie 2.0* lies in what Virilio called the political economy of speed. Far from demonizing the increased speed of our modernity, Virilio has rather tried to understand the inner logic of speed. It is in this sense that the challenge today is to try to understand how neoliberal subjectivation works. It would be necessary to learn how the political economy of speed of neoliberalism works, to the detriment of the labour force on the market. Under neoliberalism, the labour force – both in the forms of material and immaterial labour – undergoes the *Zombie 2.0* dromological metamorphosis.

In the last thirty years the political economy of speed has been absorbed and employed by the schizophrenic power of contemporary financial capitalism.<sup>46</sup> What is at stake now is a new conception of the zombie, no longer as a passive product of a certain type of subjectivation, but as a new potential for disruption of the economic framework that created it. Once again, it is not surprising that the opening scenes in Boyle's *28 Days Later* and

<sup>44</sup> Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 69.

<sup>45</sup> Martina Tazzioli, *Spaces of Governmentality: Autonomous Migration and the Arab Uprisings* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming)

<sup>46</sup> Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *After the Future*, ed. Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011).

Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* show video footage of urban rioting and forms of social unrest. The student protests in England in 2011, the Spanish and Italian *indignado* movement, the Greek uprising in the last five years, the London riots in August 2011, the "Occupy" movement all around the world, and (although in a very different way) the Arab Spring, all display how the constant generalized crisis of contemporary capitalism is being challenged by the hoard of Zombies 2.0. If zombies and subjectivities are produced as fast and reactive, this means that one viable tactic would be to use this new increased speed to turn the passive subjectivation into one that is active and acting against neoliberal policies.

A certain resignation towards an impending apocalypse stems out of a certain anxiety of our times. The end of the world, the apocalypse without revelation is, in our world, the absence (or disappearance) of the possibility of a future. Many cultural theorists have argued that one of the main traits of neoliberal economics is its lack of awareness about the long-term consequences of its policies. After the first part of the twentieth century, dominated by the dogmatic faith in technological development and capitalist expansion – which the Italian critic and media activist Franco 'Bifo' Berardi traces back to Marinetti's first "Futurist Manifesto" (1909) – the emergence of neoliberalism after the 1970s marks the beginning of a new way to relate to and perceive the future. From the relative stability of the "Fordist pact," the last forty years have witnessed the decline of a clear and promising picture of the 'years to come.'

As Berardi argued, "when we think of the ecological catastrophe, of geopolitical threats, of economic collapse provoked by the financial politics of neoliberalism, it's hard to dispel the feeling that irreversible trends are already at work within the world machine."<sup>47</sup> If we follow Lazzarato's analysis of the current process of subjectivation, neoliberalism has based its social control (and violent exploitation) through the *dispositif* of debt.<sup>48</sup> The sentence in the comic book *The Walking Dead* mentioned in the third section of this article, "We're living *borrowed time* here," appears now in a new light. Neoliberalism created the "indebted man" both as an active economic actor on the market – which, as we have seen, Lazzarato borrows from Foucault's investigation on the discursive kernels of neoliberalism – and as a political subject unable to be released from her condition as entrepreneur of herself. Accordingly, this condition of indebtedness prevents in advance any possibility of political agency.

It is in this sense that the future has disappeared, and the new zombie narratives are capable of representing the new paradigm shift of neoliberal economics. One may say, then, that the issue is one regarding the identification with zombies – the actual running horde of the undead – as the allegory of a neoliberal politico-economical subjectivity. But instead of investing our hopes in an 'undoing' of the current formation of subjectivities, it would be necessary to consciously recognize and accept what we have become and politicize this feeling of hopelessness at the "end of times." Consequently, a politicized eschatology can and should open new spaces of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>48</sup> Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*; and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Il Governo dell'Uomo Indebitato. Saggio sulla Condizione Neoliberista* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2013).

struggle against a capitalist totality which on the one hand appears to be unavoidable, and on the other hand is constantly changing its form.

The new zombified subject, although running the risk of retaining a humanist conception of subjectivity, becomes dangerous for the ruling order specifically when the ‘contagion’ is taken for granted. As Matteo Pasquinelli puts it in his ‘Manifesto of Urban Cannibalism,’ “if in the modern age ‘Europe was beginning to devour, to digest the world’, urban cannibalism is the nemesis of late capitalism.”<sup>49</sup> However, in order to reinvigorate a sense of political agency which seems to have been lost under neoliberalism, the eschatological inevitability must necessarily be coupled with what Sun Tzu affirmed 2500 years ago: “speed is the essence of war.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Wietske Maas and Matteo Pasquinelli, “Manifesto of Urban Cannibalism (Amsterdam Declaration),” accessed February 23, 2014, [http://www.urbanibalism.org/Manifesto\\_Urban\\_Cannibalism\\_Amsterdam.pdf](http://www.urbanibalism.org/Manifesto_Urban_Cannibalism_Amsterdam.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 134.