

# Protocol Z

## *The distributed social organization of zombies*

### Keywords

zombie  
crowd  
distributed network  
social organization  
network society  
protocol  
cultural fears

### Abstract

This essay analyzes the representation of distributed social organization in popular culture. Specifically, I explore this concept via the increasingly popular zombie narrative. As evident in Robert Kirkman's graphic novel series *The Walking Dead* (2003–), there is a tension between the hierarchical structure of the family and the “flat” organization of zombies crowds. I argue that this tension stems from a cultural fear of not only zombies but also anxieties surrounding Manuel Castells' “network society”. The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a trend of non-fiction books, such as *Crowdsourcing* (2009), *The Cult of the Amateur* (2007), and *You are not a Gadget* (2010), that warn of an oncoming horde. However, the zombies of these books are the participants and users of the internet. Through an analysis of E. Canetti and A. Galloway's (2004) concepts of crowds and protocol, I form an analytical framework that addresses the issues posed by S. Lauro and K. Embry's *A Zombie Manifesto* (2008). The goal of this analysis is two-fold; first, to question how zombies have become a vessel for fears surrounding the distributed network crowd and second, to suggest that this horror sub-genre is an important space for experimentation within which one can investigate organizational possibilities.

### Meta

This paper was presented at Critical Themes 2011, in New York City on April 16, 2011, at the panel entitled, *Not Just Another Face in the Cloud: Social Networks and New Collectivity*. The faculty respondent was Peter Asaro. Additional presentation materials can be found at [textaural.com/protocolz](http://textaural.com/protocolz).



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1 This event is known as a *Zombie Walk*. Organized through websites and txt-messaging, the participants converge on an agreed upon location costumed in the grotesque trappings of zombies. Since its inception in 2001, walks have occurred in major cities in North and South America, Europe, Australia, and South Asia.

2 Miller (2006) and Chou (2008).

3 This is but one reading among many, as indicated by Halberstam (1995).

4 Shaprio (2002), explains the historical background of the construction of Godzilla.

5 During the filming of *Night of the Living Dead*, Romero did not once describe his monsters as zombies. It was the public and subsequent films that classified this kind of monster as such (Moreman, 2010, p.269).

6 Bishop (2010a) p.94

7 p.270

8 p.94

## Introduction

On October 23, 2007 in Ottawa, Canada, something unusual transpired. A stretch of four and a half kilometres of street became the path of a horde of 400 staggering feet and 200 blood-drained faces. It was a *Zombie Walk*.<sup>1</sup> These spectres rose from a cemetery in a seemingly unending flow of undead that cantilevered their way through a shopping mall, and mobbed the steps of the Canadian Parliamentary buildings. Upon arrival, they were met by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who demanded to know the purpose of the “protest”. With a groan, the mass of zombies made their demands known. Brains. But as each zombie arrived at the doors of Parliament, they turned around in what can only be described as disappointment. Their shuffles and moans were mingled with the morose complaint, “...no brains...”.

Why is this happening? Why are cities all around the world witnessing zombie walks in increasing frequency and numbers? Is there actually a zombie uprising happening? In all seriousness, the answer is yes, but not necessarily for the reasons you may think. Each era has had its own cultural anxieties and corresponding monsters that go along with them. The Victorians were dreadful of sex and the disease syphilis that accompanies it (vampires<sup>2</sup>). The late nineteenth century was anxious of misguided science (Dr. Frankenstein<sup>3</sup>). With the 1950s/60s came the fears of the atomic age and the devastation it would bring (Godzilla<sup>4</sup>). The goal of the current study is to illuminate the anxieties that are specific to today’s society. This is achieved through a discussion on how these fears have been manifested in contemporary zombie narratives. Finally, I suggest that zombies present us with a fictional space in which to experiment with unfamiliar organizational patterns for which we are only just becoming aware.

## The zombie subgenre of horror

The social organization of zombies is, as will be explained, a consequence of their generic construction. In the subgenre-defining low-budget film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), director George A. Romero combined a number of horrors from previous monsters to construct his own “ghouls”.<sup>5</sup> As film and literature scholar Kyle Bishop states, Romero’s monsters were a combination of the early Voodoo zombie films,<sup>6</sup> Richard Matheson’s (1954) vampires who assault a solitary survivor in *I Am Legend*, and cannibalism, which differs from the mere bloodlust of vampires.<sup>7</sup> From this assemblage of characteristics, the film became a cult classic that both defined the subgenre as we know it today and revitalized interest in zombie films for the next decade.

A cursory analysis of *Night of the Living Dead* presents us with a list of characteristics and protocols that make zombies identifiable.<sup>8</sup> From the

9 See appendix for timecode appearance of each characteristic.

moment it was first screened in 1968, we knew the following about zombies:<sup>9</sup> their walk is a stumbling stagger (A); they appear to be dead (C) but make a moaning sound (F); they can use tools (D); they tend to congregate over time (A, E, H); they can organize enough to encircle and swarm their victims (K); they react to fire in terms of self-preservation (I); they are (or were) ordinary people (N) but are unidentifiable and anonymous; (M) they act like animals (O); they eat human flesh (P); bodily injury does not affect them (Q) unless it incapacitates the brain (G, R); humans who are bitten will die from the bite (V); all humans who die during the zombie event come back to life as zombies (S); and once zombies immobilize a victim they feed by themselves in a dispersed and orderly manner (U).

10 p.19

Beyond these characteristics, Bishop states that the classic zombie story follows other generic protocols such as having “a post-apocalyptic backdrop” that includes, “the collapse of societal infrastructures, the resurgence of survivalist fantasies, and the fear of other surviving humans.”<sup>9</sup> These aspects of the zombie narrative are integral to understanding why the subgenre has become so popular. Bishop writes that “horror fiction addresses society’s most pressing fears and is ‘nothing less than a barometer for measuring an era’s cultural anxieties’”<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, the characteristics of these monsters are not just the fancy of one particular dark imagination. They are, in fact, cultural reflections of our deepest anxieties and darkest horrors. When Bishop writes that the “twenty-first century has clearly been experiencing a zombie renaissance,”<sup>12</sup> he is establishing that zombies are relevant to the conditions that we experience today. The question then is why are the zombies our cultural mirror? What do zombies elicit from our current anxieties that other monsters do not?

11 p.9

12 p.18

13 p.31

14 Halberstam’s *Skin Shows* provides a well informed description of these monsters.

15 p.32

16 Castells defines the network society in the opening paragraph of his book of the same name: “A network society is a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by micro-electronics-based information and communication technologies. By social structure, I understand the organizational arrangements of humans [...] expressed in meaningful communication coded by culture” (p.3).

Bishop argues that the popularity of zombies stems from two attributes. First, the zombie is “the only canonical movie monster to originate in the New World”<sup>13</sup> which allows for a uniquely North American construction of horror that is not tied to other gothic monsters – like vampires, werewolves, Frankenstein’s monster – that have quintessential Victorian traits.<sup>14</sup> Second, the events of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina created the conditions that make the zombie “a logical ‘form’ for anxieties related to such moments”.<sup>15</sup> Although I do not disagree with Bishop’s observations, I believe that there is an alternative reason that explains the current popularity of zombies. Similar to the monsters of the 1950’s and 1960’s who were representative of the anxieties of the atomic age, zombies represent our anxieties of being part of what Manuel Castells (2004) describes as the “network society”<sup>16</sup>. In summary, as much as the fears of the atomic age were about nuclear energy, the zombie’s popularity is likewise connected to our reservations about the ubiquity of the network in our lives.

## Fear of the unconscious crowd

To illustrate this point, I refer to three non-fiction books that have been published in the last four years : *Crowdsourcing* (Howe, 2009), *The Cult of the Amateur* (Keen, 2007) and *You are not a Gadget* (Lanier, 2010). These titles have been chosen for their descriptions of the internet as a problematic space of social organization. In their own way, the authors warn readers of the dangerous participation in crowd behaviour and the uncritical use the internet. Their arguments are reactions to the characteristically optimistic reception of the internet and its applications. Keen, Howe, and Lanier attempt to dispel these mythic utopian qualities by questioning the assumed intellectual progress that the internet brings. In view of these concerns, the authors reveal their apprehensions of the internet through the use of uncannily familiar words : a mass of mobs, herds, hordes, crowds, swarms, and packs.

17 Keen (2007) p.95

18 p.95

19 p.92

20 p.96

21 p.45

For example, in *Cult of the Amateur* Keen describes how the wisdom of the crowd is illusory and needs to be challenged.<sup>17</sup> He argues that such “anonymous” actors base their judgements on the relevance of *popularity* and not on experts “who speak from a place of knowledge and authority”.<sup>18</sup> This disdain for the popular re-emerges when he blames the algorithms of relevance used by Google to “answer our search queries not with what is most true or most reliable, but merely what is most popular”.<sup>19</sup> Keen unapologetically decries the crowd when he quotes Charles Mackay’s 1841 *Extraordinary Popular Delusions*<sup>20</sup> and the writings of Lewis Mumford<sup>21</sup>, which describe the crowd as prone to madness, irrationality, and mass ignorance.

22 Howe (2009) p.103

23 p.175

24 p.180

Howe’s *Crowdsourcing* differs from Keen in that Howe does not deny the wisdom of a crowd. However, he caveats the wisdom of the crowd with specific qualities. He makes it clear that the crowd does not act like a company but “takes the form of a community”.<sup>22</sup> Howe continues this line of thought when he states, “[a]s individuals confer, they also reach consensus” and they “make smart predictions or come up with novel approaches to a problem” through their autonomy as individuals.<sup>23</sup> Paradoxically, even though it is capable of consensus, “the crowd needn’t, generally speaking, interact with one another”.<sup>24</sup> Logically, one would assume that in order to reach a consensus the participants would have to communicate with one another. However, Howe does not believe this to be the case.

25 p.246

26 p.75

Like Keen, Howe has certain objections to crowd behaviour. He states that “Google, YouTube, and Digg all constitute a form of mob rule, and as their importance increases, so does the mob’s influence”.<sup>25</sup> In such cases, the products of the crowd are “conversational ephemera — a kind of cultural dark matter that once took place inside church basements and corner bars”.<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, there is a division of what constitutes a “smart” mob and a “dumb” mob : crowds that are controlled by corporations to create capital benefit from the intelligence of the company as the former and

crowds that are without a capital incentive tend to create cultural landfill as the latter.

Computer scientist Jaron Lanier takes a highly polemical position in *You Are not a Gadget*. His diatribe announces: “It’s early in the twenty-first century, and that means that these words will mostly be read by nonpersons — automatons or numb mobs composed of people who are no longer acting as individuals”.<sup>27</sup> These initial words set the tone for the rest of the book. He attacks the values of internet darlings like Wikipedia and Linux with such comments as: “We shouldn’t seek to make the pack mentality as efficient as possible. We should instead seek to inspire the phenomenon of individual intelligence”<sup>28</sup> and, “[e]mphasizing the crowd means deemphasizing individual humans, ... they revert to bad moblike behaviors”.<sup>29</sup> When people do act as mobs, like contributing to the free cloud, he worries about the hidden powers that are orchestrating the group: “who is that lord who owns the cloud that connects the crowd?”<sup>30</sup> Between the lines of these comments is an obvious bias towards glorifying the individual and demeaning the crowd.

Put together, these three authors outline a particular concept of the internet that positions people as either individual and intelligent or moblike and irrational. Howe is the most moderate of the three, stating that there is potential for positive outcomes of crowd-based organization. However, these outcomes are only valued by the amount of capital a crowd can make for corporations. Keen’s description of the crowd is similar to the madding crowd of Thomas Gray’s poem *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751) who are filled with “ignoble strife”. Lanier is by far the most aggressive author of the three. For him all things crowd-related are to be met with the sharp edge of scepticism. In each of these books we see a common thread that links two underwritten anxieties. The first is the loss of individual autonomy which leads to being controlled by a powerful other. The second concerns losing one’s self to the crowd. These two anxieties have distinct consequences from one another, causing reactions that will be further explored.

Although the positions of Howe, Keen, and Lanier arise from the first decade of the 21st century, their ruminations echo the sentiments of writers from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, most notably Gustav Le Bon (1896) and Carl Jung (1922). These works concentrate on what has come to be defined as mass psychology.<sup>31</sup> Their contributions to the study of crowds provide the current study two perspectives that are not entangled with technological discourse.

Le Bon argues that the the 20th century would be “*the Era of Crowds*”,<sup>32</sup> an era that would be dominated by a crowd that is “intellectually inferior to the isolated individual”. In terms of “feeling”, the crowd’s quality depends on “the nature of the suggestion to which the crowd is exposed”.<sup>33</sup> This description establishes the baseline assumption of how crowds function. Along this line of thought, Le Bon states that the appeal for the

27 Lanier (2010) p.1

28 p.5

29 p.19

30 p.99

31 Moscovici (1985) defines mass (or crowd or group) psychology as seeking “what unites the leader to his people like a man to his shadow” (p.6).

32 Le Bon (1896) p.8

33 p.20

34 p.30

35 p.40

36 p.6

37 p.23

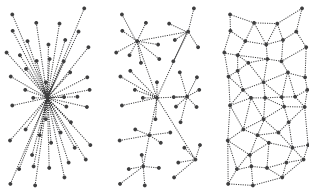
38 Freud (1922) p.3

39 p.85

40 p.89

41 p.53

42 Baran described three kinds of networks : centralized, decentralized, and distributed. It is commonly thought that centralized and decentralized networks are the antithesis of each other. As Galloway describes in *Protocol* (2004), this is not so. Decentralized networks still contain centers of activity that determine the actions of the network. It is the distributed network which exists without a center, that is the antithesis to both centralized and decentralized networks.



43 *Vodou* is the term used to describe the practices of the Haitian religion.

increase of crowds stems from its ability to give “brutal” and temporary “immense strength” to those who are “foolish, ignorant” or are powerless.<sup>33</sup> He also hypothesizes that a crowd cannot reason or be reflective<sup>35</sup> due to being unconscious of itself<sup>36</sup> which leaves the crowd susceptible to suggestion.<sup>37</sup> Through this lens, the era of crowds promised to be a period ruled by a handful of leaders and a mass of unconscious, unintelligent but brutal followers.

The concept of an unconscious crowd and its need for a suggestive force is reiterated by Freud (1922). He describes that the group is formed through relationships between individuals and can be reduced to the concept of the family with the father as leader.<sup>38</sup> When Freud states that “it is impossible to grasp the nature of a group if the leader is disregarded”, he establishes that the qualities of the leader are determining factors in the organization of the crowd.<sup>39</sup> He acknowledges that the group wishes for equality to exist, except the leader must obviously exist in a privileged position<sup>40</sup>. He adds that sometimes a group is not lead by an individual but by some sort of idea. He calls this a “secondary leader” but maintains that the abstract idea cannot be considered a substitution for an actual individual.<sup>41</sup>

Reflecting upon Le Bon and Freud in relation to Howe, Keen, and Lanier, we have a working concept of the crowd, and by inference, the anxieties that surround it. In one form a crowd is constituted by its relation to a Freudian figurehead and is necessarily unconscious, leaving it susceptible to suggestion. As evidenced by Lanier, the fear of losing control over consciousness, to be *unconscious*, is also a fear of the individual becoming a slave to the suggestion of a leader. In terms of the network society, what is being described is a conscious apprehension of the centralization of social networks. The concept of networks was originally developed by Paul Baran for The Rand Corporation in 1964.<sup>42</sup>

The centralized network is a diagram that describes connections between nodes. In this case, the nodes are unconscious and are segregated from one another. At the center of this network is a leader who is the central hub while the edges of the diagram are commands from the leader. Although the centralized network is the diagram that best describes the ideal concept of leader/follower, the decentralized network also applies, but instead of a central leader there are several minor leaders that have their own set of follower, and may, though not necessarily, report to a higher individual.

### The centralized zombie network

The fear of becoming an unconscious individual within a hierarchical relationship is a common trope in zombie fiction. For example, the first feature-length zombie film, *White Zombie* (Halperin, 1936) appropriates Haitian Vodou<sup>43</sup> The more common term, *voodoo*, is the term used to

<sup>44</sup> Lauro and Embry's *A Zombie Manifesto* deals with both the history of critical interpretations as well as discussions of the tensions between object and subject.

<sup>45</sup> Kirkman (2007) Chapter 4

<sup>46</sup> Chapter 5

describe the popularized American appropriation of the religion. folklore to form its gothic plot. It stars a white woman who is enslaved and turned into a zombie by a voodoo necromancer. The illustration of zombies as functioning within a master/slave relationship also occurs in the relatively recent novel *Monster Island* (Wellington, 2006), where the antagonist retains his consciousness while turning from human to zombie, subsequently being able to psychically control his zombie minions. Such a relationship is also established in the film *Land of the Dead* (Romero, 2005) where Big Daddy, a cognizant gas station zombie, realizes he has the ability to command other zombies. Beyond fiction, zombies as representations of slaves is common in critical film analysis. For example, zombies are explored as slaves to consumerism, (especially in *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978)) and slaves of colonization. Bishop's *American Zombie Gothic* and *Idle Proletariat* (2010), Comaroff and Comaroff's *Alien-nation* (2002), are just some examples that follow this line of inquiry. In philosophical terms, these binaries are formulated as a relationship between the necessarily conscious (and dominant) subject and an unconscious object.<sup>44</sup>

Although the subject-object binary is an integral aspect of zombie literature, the relationships described above as zombie-to-zombie relationships are exceptions to the rule. It is often the case that such relationships are exclusive to the human protagonists. Robert Kirkman's graphic novel series *The Walking Dead* (2003–), provides exemplary depictions of the heroes forming centralized relationships. Michonne, a black woman and former lawyer, first appears carrying a sword with two zombies trailing behind her, their arms severed at the shoulders, their necks ringed with a cuff and chain that Michonne leads with her left hand<sup>45</sup>. In this panel, she is obviously in control and so plays the part of master. It appears that she has used them to hide her scent from passing zombies. But does she regard them as pets, labourers, or prisoners? Before there is any action to allude to their relation, Michonne beheads each of them, an action that is the ultimate exercise of power. Consequently, in *Book 3*,<sup>46</sup> Michonne is confronted with her own evils when she meets the Governor, who similarly imprisons zombies. The Governor imprisons and brutally rapes Michonne, ensuring that she is well aware that she is no longer human, but a sex-object that belongs to him. In a grotesque and dark catharsis, Michonne escapes and enacts an equally power-driven and horrific revenge upon her captor. In the relationship between Michonne, her zombies, and the Governor, we see the literal interplay of master and slave, of subject and object.

On the more benevolent spectrum of the subject-object binary is the Freudian father and family centralized network. The actions of the lead character, Rick Grimes, are consumed by his efforts to fulfill his role as father to his son, as leader of the group, and as a former officer of the law. Thus his patriarchy is enforced in triplicate. In terms of plot, the majority

of conflict stems from the social strife of Rick assuming, maintaining, and losing various forms of control over his group, his family, and himself. It is perhaps his understandable but often questionable actions of command and control that are the darkest aspects of the series and reveal the (in)humanity that people are capable of displaying.

47 Lauro and Embry  
(2008) p.87

To aid in explaining the consequences of these portrayals, Lauro and Embry's *A Zombie Manifesto* describes the zombie's body as "irreconcilable" due to it being "both living and dead"<sup>47</sup>. This theme is important to the survival of *The Walking Dead's* characters as they try to reconcile their becoming-zombie — retaining their subjectivity while evading the ever-present danger of becoming-object. In some cases it is the fear of becoming sex-object, guillotine-object, food-object, labour-object, etc. that these representations address. Further to this point, the cultural importance of the zombie stems from it being a "boundary figure", a threshold between subject and object<sup>48</sup>. The manifesto states that the "threat to stable subject and object positions, through the simultaneous occupation of a body that is both living and dead, creates a dilemma for power relations and risks destroying social dynamics that have remained—although widely questioned, critiqued, and debated—largely unchallenged in the current economic superstructure"<sup>49</sup>. As we have seen, this tension has been manifested in a variety of ways and tends to be the primary source of unease. As the manifesto aptly states, "[t]he terror that comes from an identification of oneself with the zombie is, therefore, primarily a fear of the loss of consciousness"<sup>50</sup> and that "to be a body without a mind is to be subhuman, animal; to be a human without agency is to be a prisoner, a slave"<sup>51</sup>. And truly, "we are all already zombies [...] for they represent the inanimate end to which we each are destined"<sup>52</sup>; a comment that is made explicit in *Book 2*<sup>53</sup> by Rick Grimes:

48 p.90

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51 p.90

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53 Kirkman (2007) Chapter 2

The second we put a bullet in the head of one of these undead monsters — the moment one of us drove a hammer into one of their faces — or cut off a head, we became what we are! ... We're surrounded by the dead. We're among them — and when we finally give up we become them! We're living on borrowed time here. Every minute of our life is a minute we steal from them! You see them out there. You know when we die — we become them. 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.

This is merely a handful of examples illustrating the various ways characters navigate the tensions of the subject-object. The entire cast of survivors find shelter in a prison compound in the second book (subject as prisoner-object) engaging in constant moral battles between human compassion and animal-like savagery (subject as animal-object). Despite these elements that connect the zombie subgenre to a genealogy of master and slave, this theme is relegated to the survivors and not the



54 Bishop (2010) p.113

zombies. The zombies of *The Walking Dead* do not enact any sort of master and slave relationship to one another.<sup>54</sup> There is no leader. They do not take commands. Even though they are unconscious, they are not moved by suggestion. By this logic, the zombie as slave-object, as prisoner-object, and as animal-object only applies to the character who is on the threshold of virtually becoming a zombie, namely, the living. But herein lies the paradox: if the protagonists are literary vehicles to explore the anxieties of becoming virtual zombies through hierarchical relationships, how does the anxiety of becoming an actual zombie manifest itself. That aspect of fear so far has only been at the threshold of the individual subject becoming an individual object. The paradoxical quality of zombies, their multiplicity in addition to individuals, has escaped the psychological analysis of Le Bon and Freud.

### The distributed zombie network

The distinction that I have made so far is that one fear, the fear of becoming unconscious, is tied irrefutably to becoming part of a centralized relationship. However, as I have described in the beginning, Romero's zombies encircle and swarm their victims and do so without noticeable communication. These are not traits of either slave or master. These are of something altogether different. Freud and Le Bon both fail to adequately explain the dynamics of such a crowd. The fundamental flaw of their assessments is that they assume there is a psychology to study, in other words, that there is a consciousness or individual that can be attributed to the crowd. As will be argued, such a singular psychology may not exist. Therefore the centralized hierarchies, although undeniably still active in zombie narratives, cannot be used to explain how zombies organize as a crowd.

55 Galloway (2004) p.7

Beyond the concept of an centralized crowd, Galloway and Canetti share the common feature of placing equality, not hierarchy, as the focus of their analyses. As such, Galloway (2004) describes the particulars the distributed network, a concept developed by computer scientist Baran (1964). Instead of the power of a de/centralized relationship, Galloway describes the distributed network as controlled through protocol, "the essential points necessary to enact an agreed-upon standard of action".<sup>55</sup> Another way of explaining this is by contrasting the networks that have been so far described. Both the centralized network and the decentralized network tend to be construed as the relationships between node and hub, the hub being the center of commands. He states that "[p]rotocological networks are inclusive rather than exclusive; discrimination, regulation, and segregation of agents happen on the inside of protocological systems (not by the selective extension or rejection of network membership to those agents)".<sup>56</sup> This sense of distribution comes from giving essential import to the individual. The edges of the diagram describe the hierarchical direction of command

56 p.29

lines coming from these central individuals and going to their subservients. The more central the node, the more integral that individual is to defining the purpose of the network. As well, only the central nodes have contact with multiple subservient nodes (similar to Howe's experts not needing to speak to one another). The smaller nodes only relate to one another through their relationship with the central node.

57 p.8

On the other hand, the nodes of a distributed network are equal; any node can relate to any other node. Therefore, it is not the hubs that dictate the network's cohesive form. Instead, the edges themselves are the reason for coalescing as a network, not central authorities. Put simply, the purpose of a de/centralized network is derived by the intentions of the central node(s). In contrast, the distributed network's purpose is derived from its protocological relations, the form of its edges. This "distributed management system" is created by voluntary adoption of its tenets by a "heterogeneous material milieu"<sup>57</sup>. Equality is established by nodes voluntarily adopting the same protocol.

58 Canetti (1960) p.16

59 p.16

Although Galloway's particular conception of protocol is unique, there is a description of the crowd that is similar and proves to be useful for the current discussion. Elias Canetti's concept of crowds in *Crowds and Power* (1960), is closer in explaining zombies than that of Le Bon or Freud. We can see similarities emerge between Galloway and Canetti when Canetti speaks of equality in the crowd, stating that "[i]deally, all are equal there; no distinctions count, not even that of sex. The man pressed against him is the same as himself. He feels him as he feels himself. Suddenly it is as though everything were happening in one and the same body".<sup>58</sup> He goes on to say that the degree of density of a crowd can be attributed to its want "to rid each individual as completely as possible of the fear of being touched".<sup>59</sup> By removing this fear of being touched, one could assume that the boundaries of individuals are now porous, the crowd becomes a smooth topography of bodies instead of the defensive walls of individual and sovereign space.

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61 p.24

62 p.26

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According to Canetti, the crowd can also be described in eight principle forms: open or closed, quick or slow, rhythmic or stagnate, visible or invisible. These four sets of relationships describe different protocols for which a crowd can survive and remain cohesive. He states that "[t]he natural crowd is the *open* crowd; there are no limits whatever to its growth; it does not recognize houses, doors or locks and those who shut themselves in are suspect. 'Open' is to be understood in the fullest sense of the word; it means open everywhere in every direction".<sup>60</sup> It reaches out for everything and everyone because "the crowd never feels saturated. It remains hungry as long as there is one human being it has not reached"<sup>61</sup> and those unreached people become "the *food* of the crowd".<sup>62</sup> Moreover, "The crowd is open as long as its growth is not impeded; it is closed when its growth is limited".<sup>63</sup> Canetti explains that a crowd is sustained by giving it direction; "[i]ts constant fear of

64 p.34

disintegration means that it will accept *any* goal. A crowd exists so long as it has an unattained goal”.<sup>64</sup> This alludes to the difference between the quick and slow crowd. The quick crowd has a goal that is very near while the slow crowd has a distant goal that it must be patient in achieving,<sup>65</sup> and in doing so relies on “people who move with great persistence towards an immovable goal, and who keep together in all circumstances”.<sup>66</sup>

65 pp.33-34

66 p.44

Following how a crowd can be either open or closed, quick or slow, the third form defines a crowd’s intensity as either rhythmic or stagnating. A rhythmic crowd is one which may be small in number but makes itself appear larger through repetition, such as a group of dancers moving their feet in unison with one another, multiplying their presence through sound and motion. Thus, “there appears to be a single creature dancing, a creature with fifty heads and a hundred legs and arms, all performing in exactly the same way and with the same purpose”.<sup>67</sup> The stagnate crowd is one that “has something passive in it; it waits”, and in the waiting it relies on *density* to retain its cohesion over time. “For a long time, nothing happens, but the desire for action accumulates and increases until it bursts forth with enhanced violence”.<sup>68</sup>

67 p.35

68 p.38

Invisible and visible are the final attributes Canetti prescribes to crowds. As crowds exist in our perceptible reality, they become visible. Invisible crowds are less straight forward. Canetti explains that the invisible crowd can be described as either a potential crowd or an absent crowd. The potential crowd has the possibility to expand a current visible crowd. The absent crowd is best exemplified by the crowd of the innumerable dead. Canetti references the Celts of the Scottish Highlands’ special term *shuagh*, or “spirit-multitude”, a name given to the mass of dead. He suggests that this older form of multitude has been subsumed by science and that our modern *shuagh* are the microscopic bacteria, the great invisible crowd that can kill us.<sup>69</sup> In both instances, these crowds are literal representations that have occurred in zombie films. The most obvious is in the form of the dead rising from the grave or zombification being the result of a virus, as in *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002).

69 p.53

70 p.32

In addition to the eight forms of crowds, Canetti provides four axioms that all crowds must abide by in order to sustain themselves.<sup>70</sup>

The crowd always wants to grow.  
 Within the crowd there is equality.  
 The crowd loves density.  
 The crowd needs a direction.

Guided by Canetti, an understanding about zombie organization in terms of their multiplicity is near at hand. The forms and axioms of crowds that Canetti suggests contain similar concepts to Baran’s (and Galloway’s) distributed network. One particular similarity is the concept of equality. As described by these authors, both the crowd and the

71 Lauro and Embry  
(2008) p.87

72 p.94

73 Galloway (2003) p.92

74 Lauro and Embry  
(2008) p.88

75 p.89

distributed network are bounded by equality. Equality for Galloway is derived from the “distributed management system” that is composed of voluntary actions. Lauro and Embry follow a similar line of thought by describing the zombie-state as, “a metaphoric state”, one that is either imposed upon or “claimed for oneself”.<sup>71</sup> This statement covers both aspects of fear that have been discussed so far, that of the imposing loss of consciousness and a voluntary action of joining the crowd.

Finally, Lauro and Embry state that the zombii is both subject and object, both singular and multiple. Lauro and Embry distinguish that the zombii is neither like a hybrid nor like Guattari and Deleuze’s multiplicity. In their words, “the zombii is a paradox that disrupts the entire system”.<sup>72</sup> In other words, it is a paradox. Similarly, Galloway explains that since all the nodes of a distributed network are equal, the nodes are both the “core [and] patina”.<sup>73</sup> In sum, we have arrived at understanding that the organization is something completely different from Le Bon and Freud’s crowd of passive followers. The zombie exists as a multiplicity in a form that the manifesto defines as a *zombii*, “a consciousnessless being that is a swarm organism”.<sup>74</sup> They go on to say that we are terrified of the zombii because 1) “the zombie is an antisubject” and 2) “the zombie horde is a swarm where no trace of the individual remains”.<sup>75</sup> At least with the zombie in isolation there is either the hope of retrieving the consciousness (as in the case of Big Daddy from *Land of the Dead*) or of releasing the body with a shot to the head. In the case of the zombii, it is effectively headless and such hopes are lost. If the isolated zombie represents tensions with a finite life and a determinate death, then the zombii represents the tensions between existing as a delimited individual and a totalizing crowd.

Taken to this extent, we must ask what is the definition of a real world zombii? By mobilizing Canetti’s formal principles of crowds, (open or closed, quick or slow, rhythmic or stagnate, and visible or invisible), his four axioms, combining the irreconcilable nature of the zombie with Galloway’s protocological management system, we are able to understand the social organization of zombies, now defined as a zombii. The following subsection is an initial attempt of making such descriptions explicit.

## Protocol Z: Preliminary protocols for a zombii

- Z1 A zombii node is simultaneously both subject and object, the difference being zero.
- Z2 A zombii always wants to transform invisible nodes into visible nodes (the need for growth).
- Z3 A zombii node is simultaneously both singular and multiplicity: 1 visible, n-1 invisible. Therefore, even one visible zombie constitutes as a zombii. (the potential for growth).
- Z4 A zombii always wants to transform closed networks into open networks.
- Z5 a) Transformation occurs when the distance between subject and object has been equalized to zero (the threshold of the subject-object, where it is both but neither).  
b) The zombii will continue the process of equalization until a subject has been transformed into a zombii node (reducing the living to death so that it can be reanimated).
- Z6 If the zombii's density outweighs the subject's intensity, the subject will be equalized beyond nodal transformation (consumed to the point where neither soul nor body remains).
- Z7 The direction and speed of the zombii is determined by the intensity of subjects (the more numerous and lively the prey, the more velocity the crowd has).
- Z8 The zombii is slow if there is low subjective intensity (waiting).
- Z9 The slow zombii is densest at the boundary between the open zombii network and and the closed subject network.
- Z10 A slow zombii erupts into a quick zombii when the boundary between the open and closed network is ruptured.
- Z11 The quick zombii is densest where the subject is most intense (the body).
- Z12 The quick zombii discharges into a slow zombii when the distance between subject and object has been equalized (5a or 5b).
- Z13 Nodes condense to increase visible density.
- Z14 Nodes moan to increase invisible density.
- Z15 The zombii stops growing and therefore decays when:
  - a) all invisible nodes have been transformed into visible nodes.
  - b) there is only the open crowd of the zombii.

In view of these these philosophically-based protocols one may notice their mathematical nature. Not surprising then is that statistical studies, such as *When Zombies Attack!*,<sup>76</sup> have a kinship with this list. Future research in the realm of zombie social organization may benefit from combining the protocols listed here and the mathematical models to form a more complete comprehension of the phenomena at work.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Munz, Hudea, Imad, Smith? 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Smith? spells his name with a question mark.

## The zombii of *The Walking Dead*

This list of protocols is by no means exhaustive, but it satisfies the current need to identify examples of the zombii in fiction for which Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*, serves as an excellent site of exploration. The first protocol follows the canon of the subgenre. It describes the zombie as both living and dead. Protocol Z2 describes that the size of the zombii is relative to the potential zombies left to be turned, in other words, the number of human survivors left. Protocol Z3 defines the danger of even one lone zombie. If a character sees a zombie, there is the potential for two zombies, the zombie being visible, the character being an invisible or potential zombie. In a very real sense, all survivors are potential zombies. Protocol Z4 first describes the difference between the zombii and the survivors. The zombii is open, inclusive and a totalizing form. In *Book 1*, the zombies wander through city streets, the forests, a gated suburb community, every corner of a locked house, and the grounds of a fenced-in prison. There seems to be no place that zombies are absent. Their presence opens up all of the closed spaces. Likewise, the zombii infiltrates closed networks. The social networks that make up cities, communities, small groups of survivors, families, and even the individual all have definite (closed) boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Such boundaries are the very structures that the zombii ruptures. After a rupture, Protocol Z5 transforms the survivors into a zombie (a node of the zombii). Examples of this are endless and necessary for the zombie subgenre to provoke terror in the way that it does. Protocol Z6 explains how survivors are often overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of the zombie crowd. In the case of Thomas<sup>78</sup>, where the survivors dump his body into a throng of zombies, his body is torn apart until there is nothing left to *zombify*. Protocol Z7 describes that when survivors make noise (gunshots, yelling), zombies will become aware of them. The speed of the zombii is not the same as individual zombies. As Protocol Z8 describes, the slow zombii is one that is waiting. For instance in *Book 1*,<sup>79</sup> when Rick explains to Tyresse the two kinds of zombies: "We went into the city ... most of the zombies just sat around, not doing anything unless *provoked*". Protocol Z9 describes the way that zombies tend to congregate around the enclosed spaces that survivors occupy. In *Book 2*, the zombies constantly crowd against the prison's fence, the closest distance to the survivors that they are able to reach. Again in *Book 2*,<sup>80</sup> when Dexter opens the cell block that contains the armoury, he inadvertently unleashes a mass of quick zombii, enabling the conditions for Protocol Z10, the slow zombii erupts into a quick one and attempts to get in the closest proximity to the survivors as possible. Protocol Z11 describes that a group of zombies will converge on a single person and will tear through their body in an

78 *Book 2*, Chapter 3

79 Chapter 2

80 Chapter 4

attempt to close the distance between the subject of the individual and the object of the inanimate. Protocol Z12 describes that when there are no survivors within close proximity, the zombii will return to waiting. Protocols Z13 and Z14 describe the need for zombies to congregate in groups and the behaviour of their groans.

The final protocol, Z15 is only conjecture, but a necessary one. In the case of *The Walking Dead* there has yet to be a point where only zombies have survived. The question of what happens when the world is full of only zombies is even hypothetical in the realm of the subgenre itself. However, the nature of protocol demands that as the protocol is needed for a time, it will exist. When that time is over, the protocol is renegotiated, transformed, or forgotten.

## Conclusion

As evidenced by the examples described, protocol is a relevant application for explaining the social organization of zombies. More importantly, zombies have provided a fictional landscape in which to theorize how social organization is controlled in a network society. Such spaces allow for a certain amount of leeway in the variability that one encounters. Thus, I advocate for the popularity of the zombie subgenre. These grotesque playgrounds of the imagination are the field notes of a minor science of society. If one is to take the conceptual leap of applying these protocols to the notion of distributed networks that actually exist, be they memes, viral videos, or any other future cultural product, we may learn something vital about what it means to belong to the network society. But if that fails, if these investigations are flawed in some way, we can always return to the reflection in the uncanny mirror of zombie fiction, and gaze in horror at what is missing.

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## Appendix: Generic qualities of zombies as taken from *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)

- A 00:05:18 A lone figure stumbles in the background.
- B 00:06:36 The figure attacks Barbara.
- C 00:07:17 The rip shirt and pale face of the figure alludes to him being dead.
- D 00:08:11 The figure picks up a rock and smashes the car's window.
- E 00:12:48 Two zombies join the first one.
- F 00:17:54 A zombie that Ben is fending off moans.
- G 00:18:18 A zombie lays still after been shot in the head.
- H 00:18:38 Five zombies approach in a uniform direction.
- I 00:19:56 The zombies react to fire.
- J 00:24:22 BEN: They are afraid of fire, I found that out.
- K 00:26:57 BEN: That's when I noticed the entire place had been encircled.
- L 00:27:20 BEN: I was alone with 50 or 60 of those things standing there staring at me.
- M 00:32:20 RADIO: A virtual army of unidentified assassins.
- N 00:32:48 RADIO: They're ordinary looking people, some say they are in a kind of trance, misshapen monsters.
- O 00:36:50 RADIO: Things that look like people but act like animals.
- P 00:39:04 RADIO: Murder victims show evidence of having been partially devoured by their murders.
- Q 00:45:30 A shot to the heart doesn't kill them.
- R 00:46:02 But a shot to the head does.
- S 00:56:29 TV: It has been established that persons who have recently died have been returning to life and committing acts of murder.
- T 01:02:14 TV: How long after death does the body become reactivated?  
GRIMES: It's only a matter of minutes.
- U 01:14:25 The zombies feed in a seemingly orderly manner.
- V 01:24:30 The daughter who was bitten has died and returns as a zombie.

**How to cite this essay:**

Jankowski, S. (2011). Protocol Z: The distributed social organization of zombies. In *Critical Themes 2011*. April 15–16. The New School.

```
@conferenceJankowski2011aa,  
Address      = New York, N.Y., U.S.A,  
Author       = Steven Jankowski,  
Booktitle    = Critical Themes,  
Date-Added   = 2011-04-20 00:04:09 -0400,  
Date-Modified = 2011-04-20 00:06:52 -0400,  
Month        = April 15-16,  
Organization = The New School,  
Title        = Protocol Z: The distributed social  
              organization of zombies,  
Year         = 2011
```

**This document was typeset with the following fonts:**

Serif: Miller Text

Sans: Berthold Akzidenz Grotesk

Mono: Anonymous Pro

