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The Apocalypse Narrative and the Internet: Divided Relationships in New Natures

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The Apocalypse Narrative and the Internet:

Divided Relationships in New Natures

by

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ABSTRACT

This project proposes that one factor of growing societal interest in the apocalypse narrative is rooted in its reflection on our new landscape of telecommunication flows embodied in the Internet. The apocalypse narrative has steadily been growing in popularity, and many academics have offered potential explanations. While other analyses predominately focus on the actual apocalyptic event itself as representative of various societal fears, this project aims to focus on how characters adapt to being in the new apocalyptic landscape, and how this reflects on our own adaptation to being in the new landscape of the Internet. This project takes the work of Martin Heidegger as its primary theoretical lens in an examination of the popular television series *The Walking Dead* and the Internet streaming service Netflix. I find that both the apocalyptic landscape and the new landscape of the Internet throw us into decentered worlds where it is easy to be alienated from one another. Alleviation of our anxieties brought on by these strange landscapes lies in our recognition of being-towards-others in the world and engaging in acts of community building. However, a greater – more global – sense of community is frequently subverted by the way relationships are revealed by technology as divisive.

INTRODUCTION:

ENTERING THE WASTELAND

Irradiated landscapes from nuclear war, populations decimated by horrific plagues, civilization destroyed by extraterrestrial threat, the dead reanimating to feast on the living, or even the avenging anger of Gods, as spectators and consumers in the modern era we are well aware of the various forms the apocalypse story can take. While apocalypse narratives have existed long before this modern moment, the decade and a half since the turn of the new century has shown a noted increase in the production and consumption of these stories. This investigation will focus on the apocalypse story as a prescient reflexive metaphor on our own existence within neoliberal network society.

We will take AMC's wildly successful television series *The Walking Dead* (2010 – present) as a text emblematic of the broader apocalypse genre. Just as the apocalypse transforms the global landscape, the Internet has radically altered the way that consumers view and interact with texts like *The Walking Dead*. This investigation will take Netflix as representative of the rise in Internet streaming services.   The ultimate objective of this endeavor is to offer one explanation for the surge of interest in apocalypse narratives in the new century. We follow Rick Grimes through *The Walking Dead*'s apocalyptic landscape. Against the isolating anxieties of death, Rick bands together with like-minded individuals in the formation of a post-apocalyptic community. While Rick's community endeavors to construct safe spaces to dwell within the terrible nature of the world, these spaces are far from secure and are still always subject to threat.

Like the abstract nature of neoliberal network society, the apocalypse of *The Walking Dead* is decentered. Any number of events can occur with equal probability. The spaces where Rick's community resides are more appropriately characterized as centered spaces where community can be fostered and grounded within the chaos of the apocalypse. *The Walking Dead* is ultimately a text about turning toward community, about being towards and with others, in the face of surmounting anxiety. However, the view that *The Walking Dead* presents of community is frequently problematized by the relationships between characters that technological remnants in the apocalypse (specifically weaponry: firearms, swords, crossbows, etcetera) reveal. *The Walking Dead* more often than not presents technology as something that can only reveal divisive relationships between us. In our abstract existence on the Internet, technology can also reveal our alienation from one another. We seek out the centered space, but too often, we attempt to isolate ourselves within it, ignoring the need for an interrelation with the decentered outside.

While *The Walking Dead* takes place in the devastated remains of our society, it can be read as a relevant commentary on the spectator's conflicted stance within the networked neoliberal society that has produced the series. The abstract nature that neoliberal network society takes can produce acute anxiety and isolation. Against this isolation, we have the possibility to turn towards one another in the formation of our own new communities in net space and search for some form of abstracted space (like Netflix), which can center us in the isolating expanse of mediated neoliberal network society. Sites like Netflix can be seen as sites of virtual dwelling, offering a place to consistently remain and return within the decentered world of the Internet.

The Apocalypse and Academia

Scholars have advanced a number of explanations for the increased production and consumption of apocalyptic stories since the turn of the new century. Scholarship in the area divides into three distinct types of analysis: religious implications, the perception of a deteriorating world, and implications of metaphorical "Othering." All of these possibilities exist in *The Walking Dead* and other apocalyptic stories. These readings take the apocalyptic event itself (nuclear war, zombies, etcetera) as the primary point of analysis. There is a notable lack of scholarship providing textual readings of how the formation of new communities – the turning towards others in the face of the anxieties of death in a decentered world – mirror our own attempts to turn toward community in the face of the isolating anxieties of neoliberal network society.

Many scholars provide religious analyses of apocalyptic narratives. For instance, the majority of the writing on Cormac McCarthy's apocalypse novel *The Road* and its cinematic adaptation revolve around religious implications of the narrative. In her essay, "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative," Lydia Cooper likens the boy to a Christ figure, promising hope for the birth of a better world out of the ashes. However, this analysis serves only to lay a biblical reading onto the tale in question without scrutinizing the improbability of this better world ever taking shape. Erik J. Wielenberg in "God, Morality, and Meaning in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" depicts the story as a tale of preserving Christian morality in the apocalypse, examining elements such as the father's insistence to his son that they are "the good guys" and "carrying the fire." These religious readings promote the idea that the orders and societies of the world can be remade into some better version after the apocalypse.

The reality of these tales is far more nuanced. The potential for a better world is problematized by the reemergence of power structures created in the image of our own pre-apocalyptic society.

Another explanation advanced by scholars involves the perception that the spectators' world is spiraling towards a societal collapse like those depicted in apocalypse narratives. In his essay, "Metaphor of the Living Dead: Or, the Effect of the Zombie Apocalypse on Public Policy Discourse," Daniel W. Drezner details numerous phenomena that scholars point to as precipitating popular interest in the apocalypse, focusing on the "intersection of three trends: war, pandemics, and globalization" (827). The loom of these issues in the cultural consciousness supports the interpretation presented by Drezner and other academics, but this only offers part of the explanation. An equally important component is the projection of ourselves into the apocalyptic landscape. We are certainly fascinated by imagining possible end of the world scenarios, but we are just as interested in how we could live on and potentially thrive.

The third explanation specifically focuses on stories about infection, mutants, or zombie apocalypses. Scholars like Elzabeth Mcalister and Gerry Canavan, for example, specialize in race and gender studies and analyze the texts in relation to processes of "Othering." The apocalyptic threat (primarily zombies or mutants) and how it is handled becomes a metaphor for "othered" societal groups and the concept of othering in general. For instance, Canavan's "We are the Walking Dead" looks at the idea of the zombie as representing "the other," concluding that ultimately zombie narratives can turn the mind of the spectator toward the "zombies" that have been made in the real world, "the excluded, the forgotten, the cast-out, and the walled off" (450). This analysis doesn't place metaphorical importance on the hordes of zombies, or walkers, that populate the world of *The Walking Dead*. They are a new terrible force of nature that serves to transform the world. At most, they are a constant reminder of death, which can

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provoke a constant state of anxiety in the characters of the series. It is this animated

representation of death and the terrible way in which it transforms the world that can turn our

characters toward each other in the creation of communities.

The prevailing academic theories on interest in apocalypse narratives focus on a number

of anxieties and social occurrences that are reflected by the event of the apocalypse itself.

However, the spectator also identifies with the struggles of our characters, as they attempt to

form some ordered society out of apocalyptic chaos. It is no accident that in most apocalypse

stories (and 21st-century narratives in particular) the origin of the cataclysm remains

unexplained. The event itself is less important than the story being told. The impetus of these

stories does not center on a fascination with how the world falls apart but how we rebuild and

live after the fall.

In his analysis, “*The Walking Dead* as a Critique of American Democracy,” Isaac Berk

comes closest to the sort of reading we will investigate here. Berk focuses on the first three

seasons of *The Walking Dead* as a pertinent analysis of the operation of American democracy.

Unfortunately, Berk’s critique is short sighted in focusing on American democracy and not

extending his critique to the broader neoliberal system. The centerpiece of Berk’s argument is

that Rick Grimes becomes the de-facto leader of his group not through any inherent qualities but

through his position as a white male. Berk also provides critiques of other characters’ positions

in Rick’s group as being predetermined due to class and racial issues pertinent to the American

democratic system. When characters begin to change in ways that don’t fit with his analysis,

Berk blames the breakdown of the validity of his critique in later seasons on changes in who was

running the show at the time. “The radical critique developed by [Frank] Darabont (fired in July

2011) survived under [Glen] Mazzara in the third season but withered under attack from new

show runner, Scott Gimple, in the fourth" (Berk 49). The problem with Berk's analysis (and in turn his problem with the evolution of the show) is that – while the early seasons may offer a potential critique on American democracy – the trajectory of the characters and the apocalyptic society as a whole is potentially targeting a much larger scope: existing in the decentered landscape of neoliberal network society.

Terrible Places in the Apocalypse

While this paper will focus on *The Walking Dead* as emblematic of the apocalypse genre, it is necessary to acknowledge the genre's own status as a sub-genre of horror. Televisual incarnations of the apocalypse inherit many of their narrative and aesthetic sensibilities from their horror predecessors. An essential aesthetic quality, which the apocalypse narrative amplifies, is best understood in terms of Carol Clover's conception of "the terrible place."

Clover details the terrible place in relation to her own investigation of the slasher genre. The terrible place in these films is often "a tunnel or a house in which the victims inevitably find themselves" (30). The terrible place exists on the outskirts of the comforting and familiar in the liminal spaces on the fringes and borders of our society. Though Clover's own investigation goes on to focus on issues of gender and sadomasochism in the slasher film, the importance of the terrible place cannot be understated. It is the focal point where everything awful can – and probably will – transpire. The artifacts uncovered and acts performed in these spaces reveal the nature of the narrative world that surrounds the characters and the spectator. "Into such [terrible places] unwitting victims wander in film after film, and it is the conventional task of the genre to register in close detail the victims' dawning understanding, as they survey the visible evidence of the human crimes and perversions that have transpired there. That perception leads directly to

the perception of their own immediate peril" (Clover 31). The apocalypse narrative takes the

essential notion of the terrible place and expands it beyond the isolated tunnel or house. The

violence of the apocalyptic event renders our world a vast landscape inundated with crimes,

perversions, and persistent threats revealing the constant and immediate peril of anyone who has

survived.

A promotional still from *The Walking Dead* exemplifies the importance of this concept to

the series' aesthetics [Figure 1].

Figure 1: Rick Grimes rides into the terrible place that Atlanta has become.

In this frame, evidence of humanity and civilization is hollowed out and rendered alien. All that

remains is a vacancy, an emptiness, a dead-and-gone nothingness in place of the once familiar.

The highway is congested with cars abandoned in the act of flight. Towering buildings stand as

a monument to a once bustling city turned tomb. The scene is presented to us in a grim greyish

filter, so, even though there is sunlight, it seems to come through some awful distortion. Rick

Grimes, our main protagonist, is the sole figure riding into the unknown horrors of the ruin.

This radical expansion of the terrible place across the globe is on concentrated display in

the series opening title sequence [Figure 2]. The title sequence assaults the viewer with a visual

and auditory onslaught. As strains of strings turn to even darker, brooding cacophony, the

camera-eye sends us roaming through the barren landscapes of terrible places. The main function of the title sequence is to plunge the viewer abruptly and with appropriate apocalyptic violence into the horrors that surround the characters of the series.

Figure 2: Shots from *The Walking Dead*'s main title sequence.

We view decrepit buildings, the ruins of cities, and flashes of the monstrous walking dead, which could lurk in all of them. Most interesting in the title sequence is the lack of images of our main cast. When an actor's name appears, it is accompanied by an image that serves as a synecdoche for their character. Rick, for example, is represented in various seasons by a newspaper with a headline about him being shot, by a sheriff's badge, and finally by an image of the distinctive revolver he carries. We can read from this that there is no real place for humanity in this world. The terrible places have taken over, and it will only be with monumental effort that people will be able to claim some kind of space in this new landscape. The transformation of our world into a terrible place is not just the fundamental element driving the horror of the apocalypse story. It

is also the driving force behind all of our character's actions. It is the looming presence of the terrible place all around that turns our characters towards each other in community.

In their efforts to establish communities, the characters turn to the use of tools, which the synecdoches in the title sequence reinforce. This betrays the importance of harnessing the technological remnants that still exist for the construction of new communities and potentially a new world. However, as we will investigate later, most of the technology shown in the title sequence and the technology that the series most emphasize are tools meant for combat and violence: destruction and death rather than construction and fostering community.

Heidegger in the Apocalypse

The terrible nature of the apocalypse aptly lends itself to a Heidegerrian analytical lens. In Martin Heidegger's philosophy, we (as beings) are thrown into the world. Our being-in-the-world, notes Kaja Silverman, is subject to "concrete parameters," which encompass "such notions as a person's social, geographical, and economic circumstances" all of which serve to significantly limit our freedom in the world (34). One of the most pertinent revelations we can take from Heidegger is his thought of "being-towards-death." As beings we are acutely aware of our mortality – of the inevitability of death, or the nothing, as Heidegger terms it. In the desolate landscape of *The Walking Dead*, the only certainty is that death will come – most likely with horrific violence. Anxiety towards death becomes the constant state of being in the terrible nature of the world.

Heidegger tells us that "Dasein [being] means: being held out into the nothing" (What is Metaphysics? 103). In this state of "being-towards-death," there comes a great anxiety spurred by the inevitability of the negation of being. Ultimately, in the face of our mortal anxiety there

come two distinct possibilities for the nature of our existence. We can be crippled by anxiety; the essence of our being nihilated, as we exist only towards the inevitable nothing. Or, Heidegger urges, existence can be transformed into a great project of being-towards-others in the world into which we have been thrown. We see many characters in *The Walking Dead* opt for suicide rather than struggle in this new environment. However, Rick Grimes is not paralyzed by the anxiety of being-towards-death; he is spurred by it.

A central question for Heidegger becomes how we can exist without merely being entrapped by our anxiety of being-towards-death. He finds that our state of "being-towards-others" in the world begins to nullify our state of anxiety. As we are "held out into the nothing" we come to "the revelation of beings in general" (What is Metaphysics? 103). At the same time that we are being held out into the nothing, we recognize that other beings are as well. Through his leadership of a community of survivors, Rick is acutely aware of his being-towards-others. In the danger and losses that have befallen his community, he has confirmation that we all are "being held out into the nothing." It is Rick's turning toward others that can ultimately alleviate his and their anxieties. His existence becomes an effort of establishing his community in a centered space within the terrible nature and chaos of the world. He does so through a process of dwelling and building.

In *Building Dwelling Thinking*, Heidegger investigates a fundamental aspect of the essence of being: our need to dwell. The foundation of his exploration revolves around the etymological relation between building and dwelling. Heidegger states, "to be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell" (Building Dwelling Thinking 349). Heidegger takes this from an exploration of the German word "bauen," which simultaneously means to "cherish and protect, to preserve and care for." He also relates "bauen" to the Gothic

"wunian," which means "to remain, to stay in a place … to be at peace" (349 -350). The human act of dwelling has far weightier implications than modern understanding and usage of the word reveals. Dwelling "on the earth already means [being] under the sky … remaining before the divinities and include[s] a belonging to men's being with one another. By a primal oneness the four – earth and sky, divinities and mortal – belong together in one" (351). For Heidegger, dwelling initiates our essential being in the realization of our interconnection – our oneness – with the earth, sky, and the heavens as well as with the other mortals being held into the nothing. Rick is thrown into a crisis of dwelling at the outset of *The Walking Dead*. Rick learns it is impossible to dwell in the terrible nature of the new world. When forced to wander in the terrible places for too long, Rick's community is reduced to mirror images of the walking dead, as they trudge hungry and in desperate search for some space in which to dwell. In the terrible place, there can be no peace or stationary nature to existence. They are always on the move and always expecting to kill or be killed.

In his journey through the apocalyptic world, Rick must make use of whatever technology remains to build some form of centering space for his community in the decentered terrible nature of the apocalypse. In Heidegger's thought, the essence of technology is "a mode of revealing" (The Question Concerning Technology 319). Technology should serve as a "bringing-forth," as an unconcealment of truth. However, Heidegger warns us that modern technology serves as a "challenging forth" wherein the world and its resources are taken as "standing-reserve"; they are valued only in how they can be ordered and materially harnessed for our own purposes. The mind set revealed to us by modern technology is dangerous in that it, too, easily restricts us into a single conception of the world: a materialist view in which everything must be ordered and everything in the natural world exists only to benefit us -- as

something to be taken. It is in its presentation of technology that *The Walking Dead* becomes most problematic. Even with the collapse of most modern technology, our characters seem to still inhabit the dangerous mindset that Heidegger warns against. They are caught in a challenging-forth of the world rather than a bringing-forth. In a text that revolves thoroughly on the establishment of community and the potential rebuilding of the world, the technologies that predominate the diegesis are tools of destruction and death. In episode 5.12, Rick says that people in the new world measure you "only by what they can take from you." This quote betrays that *The Walking Dead* begins to present people themselves as standing reserve, which was Heidegger's ultimate fear. While a multitude of communities like Rick's may exist as examples of being-towards-others, the lethal technology that overwhelms the narrative and our characters' lives reveals their relationships to each other and to the world with only one possibility: the perpetuation of violence. This prevents them from a bringing-forth and unconcealment of the very interconnection that Heidegger finds in building: the primal oneness and truth of being with one another in the world.

Part of this investigation will focus on *The Walking Dead's* most recent season. In this period, Rick's group has established themselves in the well-fortified settlement Alexandria. Rick and the other dwellers of Alexandria constitute a post-apocalyptic community, a group of like-minded individuals who have turned toward one another in the face of their mortal anxieties. Though Alexandria is the safest space Rick has inhabited in the apocalypse, its safety should be viewed only as circumstantial. No matter how strong its walls can be made, it will still be subject to danger. We see its walls breached twice in the sixth season of *The Walking Dead*: once by an invading community and once by a horde of walkers. As a space it may allow its residents to remain in a place, but this stationary existence is far from consistently peaceful.

However, it is this ability to remain in a place like Alexandria -- to find some center in the chaos of the world -- that allows our characters to begin cherishing, protecting, and caring. A space like Alexandria fully opens the possibility to turn towards others in a project of community, accepting the inevitability of our mortality. However, *The Walking Dead*'s conception of technology and centered spaces as places that can and should be entirely separated from the broader world serves to isolate individual communities like Alexandria from one another. Communities are interested only in what they can take from each other for their own benefit, restricting *The Walking Dead* to only offering us a view of the post-apocalyptic world that revolves solely around the perpetuation of violence rather than fostering a sense of global community.

For most of us living in pre-apocalyptic America, dwelling seems to be less in crisis. The majority of us have homes within communities that are not under obvious constant threat. However, in the building connected to our dwelling, we have constructed a vast array of telecommunication technologies (telephones, radio, television, and the Internet, which incorporates all previous technologies into itself), which have come to comprise their own abstract nature, which has been stripped of its centers albeit in a less cataclysmic fashion. This representational and abstract world presents our own crisis of dwelling, as we search for some identifiable center in a decentered socioeconomic landscape and attempt to form new communities against the potential anxiety and isolation of this new nature.

New Natures

Our modern society is organized by our neoliberal economic system, which purports to bolster the freedom of every individual. Freedom of consumer choice, increased democracy, and

liberty are the heralding cries of neoliberal theory. Yet, the transformation that neoliberalism has wreaked on the world is far removed from these benevolent values, serving to reify class hierarchies and consolidate power at the top.

David Harvey states that neoliberalism can be seen in two ways: "either as a utopian project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (19). I side with Harvey's opinion that the course of neoliberal development has operated far from any conception of utopia. Neoliberalism presents "wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights," but these are only a benevolent face hiding "grim realities of the restoration or reconstitution of naked class power" (Harvey 119). Within the neoliberal system, we are pushed toward a state of individual rather than collective involvement. We separate ourselves from the reassurance that projects of community building and being-towards-others provide.

Neoliberalism has been reified by the development of our telecommunication technologies, which serve to bolster its global reach and ultimate objective of solidifying class divisions and consolidating capital. The society created by this convergence of technology and neoliberal theory has been aptly dubbed neoliberal network society. Recalling Heidegger's thought, technology in neoliberalism operates with the intent to challenge-forth and view the world only as a material resource to benefit us – as standing reserve.

In his book, *Telesthesia: Communication, Culture, and Class*, McKenzie Wark characterizes the landscape of neoliberal network society and the effects its proliferation has on us. Wark views society as having progressed from first to "third nature." "First nature" is undisturbed nature – the world as it was before the interference of people. "Second nature" is the

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state of the world in modernity: an overlay of the world's natural state built up by humanity. Second nature "is an overcoming of the tyranny of nature, achieved through the social organization of labor" (Wark 30). This second nature is the state of modernity wherein the tyrannies of natural order are replaced by the tyrannies created by humanity (social injustice, class divisions, atrocities of all forms). Second nature is a carefully constructed nature, which utilizes our technology to craft the natural world into a new, more hospitable nature.

Passing into our current socio-historical moment, Wark finds that post-modernity is characterized by an ever-expanding third nature superimposed onto our second nature. Third nature encompasses a flow of information and communication. "The passage from modernity to postmodernity seems […] better described as the passage from one form of abstraction to another – from the second nature of abstract social spaces […] to the abstract communicational spaces created by the telegraph, telephone, television, and telecommunications" (Wark 30). Wark names these abstractions caused by various telecommunication technologies telesthesia, which is the name we can give to the frequently alienating effects of neoliberal network society. Our world becomes less about the physical and concrete and begins to revolve around informational abstraction. While the Internet collapses distances, this is a digital and ultimately metaphorical collapse that removes us from feeling grounded in the reality of our constructed second nature. We now have the sense of "being neither here nor there" (Wark 35). This lack of center, of concrete positioning within the world, brings an acute anxiety and isolation to existence within neoliberal network society. Despite the ability to communicate with countless individuals from all parts of the world at the push of a button, these communications are representational and can be even more isolating.

Still, our telecommunication technology does not merely have to isolate. Marshall McLuhan found that the development of our telecommunication network served to connect us rather than alienate us from one another. He famously stated, "the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village" (McLuhan 31). McLuhan saw advances in telecommunication (primarily radio and television) as creating a new two-way passage of information from media to consumer and consumer to media. In some sense, the global village has been realized on the Internet where "almost any individual in front of a blank online screen [has] enormous power over what transpires upon it" (Levinson 49). The Internet turns us towards a community mentality where like-minded individuals form their own groups and allegiances in the net space. We see this take form in forums, Twitter hashtags, Facebook groups, and other similar methods of online congregation. The formation of communities on the Internet, the turning toward others, staves off the potential for alienation that comes in the abstracted forms of third nature. However, this can also present the danger of isolation; we begin to operate only for individual benefit – a challenging forth of the world – and can easily ignore the interconnection between our centered spaces and the larger decentered world.

This analysis proposes that Netflix can be seen as a form of distinct space within the vast flows of abstractions: the potential for some form of center, which can facilitate the perpetuation of communities in the net space. Of course, this does not come without its own problematic elements. Netflix can offer a sense of center within third nature, but we run the risk of failing to acknowledge our interconnections with the broader decentered world. Technology also reveals divisive relationships on the Internet just as it does for Rick Grimes in apocalyptic Georgia. On the Internet, we are frequently left wondering if there can ever truly be a greater sense of community, or if we will remain divided into our own niche communities in virtual spaces.

While the apocalypse of *The Walking Dead* obliterates our abstract third nature of communication flows, it does present a world lacking centers, as what remains is only a ghostly image of our constructed second nature: roads cluttered with abandoned vehicles, ruins of cities mostly populated by the walking dead. The terrible places overtake our world, and the nature of the apocalypse becomes a terrible nature, which is largely uninhabitable. We see characters turn towards one another in the new potentially isolating nature of this world, forming post-apocalyptic communities. However, the relationships that technology reveals between characters in *The Walking Dead* is problematic in that it becomes a challenging-forth of the world, which prevents any revelation of primal truth and only serves to perpetuate a cycle of violence in this apocalyptic world. As a piece of popular art, which reflects upon the society that has produced it, we can find that *The Walking Dead* gives us the ability for us to acknowledge and contemplate our own relationships of division, offering the potential to reorient our own perceptions and relationships.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE WALKING DEAD: A WORLD DIVIDED

The opening scene of the first episode of *The Walking Dead* shows us Rick Grimes dressed in full sheriff's uniform. He travels along deserted roads in a police cruiser before stopping at a gas station to siphon gas. The scene lacks a soundtrack, and even the usual roar of a car engine is subdued in the mix. The first clear sound we hear is Rick calling out to a young girl at the gas station. The girl has her back to the camera, but, when she turns, we identify her as one of the walking dead. Blood stains cover her pajamas, and her cheek is torn and bloody. Hungry growls creep softly into the soundscape, as teeth gnash. Rick fires his distinctive firearm -- a massive .357 magnum revolver. The report thunders into the mix followed by the sickening smatter of bullet colliding with head. Blood flies, and the body hits the ground. The ominous discordant strings of the title theme swell manically into the foreground.

After the opening scene, the viewer is left with little doubt about the nature of the narrative into which they have entered. *The Walking Dead* casts us into a world consumed by terrible places. In his examination of *The Walking Dead*, Brandon Kempner suggests that this world has shifted from a "centralized to a de-centralized world view" (219). *The Walking Dead*'s apocalyptic landscape is an image of our world that has been stripped of its centers: educational, religious, and government institutions. Great cities, which once could act as societal centers, only stand as monument to the dead who still roam the streets. There is no concrete direction to take or place to go that ensures safety. This is a world where chaos predominates,

where one struggles to feel grounded. Another function of the series' opening title sequence is to reveal the decentralized nature of this world. The camera sends us flying through various locales, which are connected only by the central theme of being terrible places. We speed through desolate landscapes and decrepit buildings, shots of which are broken up by flashes of the undead. There is no chance to rest or remain in place in the title sequence, and the presence of only metaphorical images for our characters gives us nothing to which to concretely relate. Likewise, *The Walking Dead*'s theme has no melody to grasp, only furiously arpeggiating strings, providing the viewer with no comforting or centering effect.

Still, there is the possibility (even the need) for our characters to create spaces that can center them in this world. After the title credits of the first episode, *The Walking Dead* jumps back before the cataclysm, showing Rick shot in a standoff. The cut after this takes us to a dazed Rick waking in a deserted hospital; the-world-as-he-knew-it is already consumed and laid to waste. Rick's transition into the apocalypse is as abrupt and violent as the viewer's introduction. In his Marxist critique "We are the Walking Dead," Gerry Canavan comments on this importance, "The fear of moral chaos of the early outbreak will necessarily give way to interest in the way society changes in the wake of the zombie disaster—and so it's no surprise that [*The Walking Dead*] … skip[s] the initial outbreak and get[s] immediately to the post- apocalyptic breakdown world" (435). It is important that Rick is left alone to be introduced to the apocalypse. When he is eventually reunited with his wife and son and introduced to the group that will be the beginning of his community, he has had time to wander alone – isolated and anxious in the face of death. Kempner notes that in this world "a singular 'truth' or 'safety' no longer exists" and all "paths can be seen as equally right and equally wrong" (219). The widespread emergence of the terrible place decentralizes our world. There is no concrete

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destination for our characters and there can be no assurances that any degree of safety lies in any direction. Rick's band of survivors begins to constitute his post-apocalypse community, a group of like-minded individuals brought together by the potentially isolating nature of this decentered world. Our characters must locate spaces that can function as centers amidst the decentered chaos. These are spaces where they will be able to remain and to dwell. Spaces where the state of being-towards-death can be accepted and turned into a project of community building. At best, these spaces can never be entirely secure from the terrible place and nature of the world; they can only serve to facilitate the formation of community – of being-towards-others – against the anxiety of the realization of our mortality. At worst, they become spaces of isolation where characters attempt to deny their interconnection with the broader world.

However, *The Walking Dead* becomes problematic in the relationships technology continually reveals between its characters. All that remains of our technology in *The Walking Dead* are remnants. The technology that the series emphasizes the most in its diegesis is weaponry: firearms, swords, crossbows, etc. This is also a major facet of how the series is advertised to the viewer. Shots of characters wielding weapons predominate promotional stills and adverts of the series, just as they predominate its narrative world. The mindset that characters carry into the apocalypse concerning technology is also a remnant of our neoliberal network society, which encourages a sense of individual freedom and challenging-forth of the world rather than fostering a sense of broader community. Our characters still view the world only in terms of what it can give to us, in terms of how we may benefit from it. They view other communities only by what can be taken for their own community's benefit, or that other communities will interfere with their own acquisition of material. While *The Walking Dead* portrays a world in which community building and establishing centered spaces is of supreme

importance, the technology that predominates its diegesis is technology of death and destruction. This is a world that could be rebuilt in a great interconnection of communities. This would "increase the chances of survival of everyone," and, in this pursuit, our characters would "work together" (Devlin and Cooper 64). However, *The Walking Dead* only presents a view in which technology reveals the world as hopelessly violent with communities locked in struggle against one another. This is apparent in the two centered spaces on which this chapter focuses: Rick's community at the prison and the Alexandria settlement of which Rick's community becomes part. Though isolated communities like the prison and Alexandria can form, they will have difficulty ever connecting with other communities in any broader sense of being-towards-others, because of the way that this technology reveals relationships in this world as hopelessly violent.

The Prison: The Failed Experiment

At the beginning of season three, Rick's community begins to establish a centered space in an old prison secluded in the wilderness. They set up residence here after a winter described as "wandering in circles." They have been traveling aimlessly in a world that no longer has any concrete destinations. The prison offers a grounded location to remain in a space within the terrible place of the world. This is a space where their being-towards-death, which can only induce a state of anxiety when wandering in the decentered nature of the terrible place, can be acknowledged and made into a great project of community building. The image of the prison itself conjures very specific connotations. We think of isolation, of being cut off from the rest of the word, and this is exactly what unfolds for Rick's community. While they are centered within the prison, there is little hope of expanding this notion outside of their walls. A schism always

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remains between the centered nature of the community and the decentered expanse of the larger world.

The relationships revealed by *The Walking Dead*'s focus on challenging-forth technology does not allow this isolated community to establish any broader sense of community beyond the bounds of its own space. Rick's community at the prison is drawn into a vicious war with The Governor and his neighboring settlement, Woodbury. During this arc, *The Walking Dead* dedicates an entire episode ("Clear" 3.12) to Rick's acquisition of additional firearms in order to fight this war. While The Governor is eventually defeated and vanishes, the effect of this war on Rick and his community cannot be understated, as it orients them toward a relationship of confrontation with other survivors. Before the third season, we have seen Rick as a "synecdoche for the pre-zombie social order" (Canavan 436). For the first two seasons, Rick wears his sheriff's uniform, even keeping his badge pinned on his shirt. Initially, he struggles with perpetrating violence against other people. It is the war with the Governor that brings Rick's community into a view that technology has revealed relationships in this world as revolving entirely around violence. Even after the victory over the Governor, Rick's community does not attempt to seek out any other neighboring communities in an effort to establish some broader interconnected communal system, which could establish a new sense of centers to this world outside of their own isolated space.

The opening shot of season four introduces the viewer to a different world than what we have come to expect. We see Rick walk down to the prison field, which now has a pigsty and growing crops. The only noise we hear is an old country song playing through earbuds from Rick's Walkman. The only walkers we see are blurred shapes in the background pressing on the

fences, as Rick tends his crops. Like Rick, we are immersed in nostalgic artifacts and

temporarily removed from the violence we have come to expect from this world.

We see shots of Rick working the earth with a hoe. This is one of the only times in the

series that we see a character actively using a piece of technology not meant for warfare. It gives

us a glimmer of hope that Rick, and perhaps the series, is moving away from the challenging-

forth of the world that we have seen previously. In his cultivation of the earth, Rick is bringing-

forth the world in its true essence, which is the kind of positive technological relationships that

Heidegger envisions. However, as quickly as our hope that *The Walking Dead* will realize

another potential relationship revealed by technology, this hope is snatched away.

Rick hits something solid in the soil, something buried just beneath the surface. The "thunk" is

the first sound we hear over the country song. Rick unearths a pistol. We get a close up shot of

his hand, weighing the gun – almost caressing it [Figure 3].

Figure 3: The pistol beneath the surface.

As quickly as we are given hope that relationships in this world might be reoriented, *The*

Walking Dead reminds us of its predominant technology and the relationships it reveals between

us. As he holds the gun, we see a few shot reverse shots of Rick staring into the eyes of a

zombie clawing at the prison's chain-link fence. Rick removes one of his earbuds and the collective groans and snarls of zombies overwhelm the country song in the mix [Figure 4].

Figure 4: Shot-reverse-shot of Rick Grimes staring out into the terrible place.

The viewer is returned abruptly to the reality of this world. However, this doesn't faze Rick. He returns his earbud and throws the pistol into a wheelbarrow before returning to his work. Rick seems content to ignore the mass of zombies pressing onto the fences of his space. He wants to believe that the centered space of the prison can be fully separated from what lies outside.

It is significant in this regard that Rick is shown by himself – isolated – in this opening sequence. It is representative of his community's isolation in the world. While the centered space of the prison allows them to turn toward those residing in this space, *The Walking Dead* prevents them from being-towards-others in a broader, more global, sense. Though they are building their own community, the pistol is buried just beneath the surface. It is unearthed with ease. The isolated nature of Rick's community at the prison and their unwillingness to engage with the broader world is the ultimate cause of the failure of this safe haven.

In the second episode of season four, a fatal illness breaks out within the prison. This happens at night, and by morning, a number of Rick's community have been transformed into

the flesh-eating undead. In his article, "My Zombie, My Self," Richard Greene characterizes the zombie as the mindless – and flesh hungry – reanimation of a dead body. The zombie is "distinct from other dead things," because they "are not at rest" (210). The zombie is the constant reminder here of the outside – of the decentered world with which Rick seems content not to deal. Now, the decentered world of the outside has found its way inside of his centered space. This betrays the problematic stance that Rick has begun to take at the beginning of this season. There can be no true separation between the inside and the outside, the centered and the decentered aspects of this world. It requires a negotiation between the two.

    As *The Walking Dead* progresses, the threats to Rick's community turn exponentially away from the walkers and towards other communities. Rick's community has become orientated into a relationship of violence with other survivors. However, we can envision that another possibility is harbored in this technology, that another relationship can be established in this world. Heidegger believes that in the supreme danger of technology (its incitation of challenging-forth) there also lies a saving power – the ability to "fetch something home into its essence" (The Question Concerning Technology 333). The characters of *The Walking Dead* could reorient their perception of technology to a bringing-forth, an unconcealment of truth. Currently, they only challenge-forth, and make the world hopelessly violent as communities war among each other. The view of the world that the series could present is one of broader community. The technology that predominates *The Walking Dead'*s diegesis could just as easily be viewed as a technology capable of returning the world to its proper essence, of negotiating the isolated centered spaces with the decentered spaces that lie outside. It could be viewed as a saving technology rather than a divisive technology. Unless the characters of *The Walking Dead* can conceive of this essential difference – of the bringing-forth of the world as it should be

versus the challenging-forth of the world as resource – they will remain trapped in a hopeless cycle of violence against one another.

In season four, the Governor is able to take control of another neighboring community of survivors and incite them to wage war against Rick's community. The prison is obliterated as a centered space, as the few of Rick's community who are able to survive are forced out into the terrible place. As the viewer of *The Walking Dead*, it is far too easy to accept that this outcome (the Governor seeking his revenge) was inevitable. However, we should envision an alternative. The Governor is capable of suddenly reappearing at the prison because of the isolation of Rick's community from the broader world. If Rick's community had been establishing a greater sense of being-towards-others, a sense of a more global community, they may have been made aware of the Governor's reemergence. They may have even been able to prevent him from taking over this neighboring community and inciting them to perpetuate further violence. This is the result of Rick's community's inability to expand the sphere of their community beyond their single centered space, viewing their space as somehow necessarily distinct and separate from what exists in the larger world.

Alexandria: The Potential for Broader Community

In the fifth season, Rick's community (after wandering and struggling for some time in the terrible place) is brought into the already established community of Alexandria. In comparison to the multitude of losses and horrors that have befallen Rick's people, the Alexandrians have known little hardship in this world. Alexandria has electricity and running water. Many of the Alexandrians have dwelt here since the beginning of the apocalypse. They have experienced few losses and have never come into conflict with another community. There

is a notable difference between the way this community operates and the way Rick's community operated at the prison. The Alexandrians actively seek out potential new members (like Rick's community) to bring into their settlement. The name Alexandria even conjures the great biblical city of Egyptian kings: a stark contrast to the meager settlement of the prison.

Rick views the Alexandrians as weak and ill adjusted to the new world due to the ease of the existence they have experienced. As a result, he finds them to be just a liability to his community's own survival. In this way, Rick operates in means of challenging-forth, viewing the world and even other people in terms of how they can benefit from them. Rick sees no material value in the Alexandrians, believing they cannot possibly benefit him in this world. Rick goes as far to plan to take Alexandria for his own purposes through violent means. Even though Rick's community has been brought into and offered roles within this larger community, their assimilation is made difficult due to the relationships that technology reveals in *The Walking Dead*.

Still, the events that unfold in Alexandria present a glimmer of hope that at least our protagonists can reorient these technological relationships. In Episode 6.9, "No Way Out," Alexandria's walls are breached by a horde of walkers. After rushing his son to the infirmary, Rick storms out into the horde of walker's alone. The shots we get of Rick's initial combat with the walkers come with frantic cuts and tight close framing. This is emblematic of Rick's anxiety toward death in this moment. He is isolated in the decentered horde of the terrible place. Over the course of this sequence, more characters join Rick in combat both from Rick's original community and from the community of Alexandria. The more characters that join the fray the longer the shots become between cuts. The camera becomes steadier and eventually stable in comparison to its shaky beginnings. The form of this sequence comes to represent the coming

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together of the Alexandria community with Rick's community. With the explicit reminder of their being-towards-death, they recognize the need of being-towards-others, of existing for and with one another in the space of Alexandria.

For this analysis, there is an equally important element to this sequence. Alexandria is brought together as a cohesive community not in a conflicted relationship with another community of survivors but with and against the terrible place itself. This gives us hope, that the relationships of our characters can be reoriented away from a cycle of violence and towards a realization of our interconnection with each other and the decentered nature of the terrible placeß. However, this is still only a glimmer of hope for the world of *The Walking Dead*. We should acknowledge that the assimilation of Rick's community and the community of Alexandria comes when the Alexandrians prove their worth to Rick. They establish themselves as beneficial assets capable of assisting him in survival. This fact makes it dubious if Rick's community's relationship toward the broader world will really ever change from a challenging-forth, materialist view.

The Worst of Us

The Walking Dead presents us with a terrible world. Undead monsters prowl the landscape. The world is rendered directionless, decentered. Our protagonists struggle to establish grounding, centered spaces within this anxiety inducing chaos. Still, these centered spaces are also sites of great peril, particularly as our characters view them as insulated – as somehow separate – from the greater decentered world. The greatest relief to the anxiety generated by the constant reminder of their mortality comes from the formation of post apocalyptic communities – in the recognition of the need of being-towards-others in the world.

The Walking Dead presents a unique opportunity for its characters to come together with common interest. The world could be rebuilt in a great interconnection of emerging communities. We could bring-forth the world and the realization of primal truth rather than harnessing it only for our benefit. Still, *The Walking Dead* will not allow this to come to fruition. In the relationships it portrays between people and between disparate communities, the series encourages us to accept that our technology can only orient us towards one-another in a challenging forth of the world. To survive in a lawless world, even the best of us – like the once morally upright sheriff's deputy Rick Grimes – must resort to becoming ruthless killers embroiled in violence. While we are encouraged to accept this outcome, the viewer of *The Walking Dead* should look more to the positive glimmers of hope than the brutal mire of bloodshed. We should look to perceive the actions of *The Walking Dead*'s characters for what they are and what they could be: as a bringing-forth of the world rather than a challenging-forth.

CHAPTER TWO:

NETFLIX AND DWELLING ON THE INTERNET

Our world has changed. The landscape of our existence has been irrevocably altered. Our lives have turned exponentially from the concrete physical world and towards an abstract flow of information. In this world, we can find ourselves adrift and directionless, existing with no concrete center. The scope of the Internet, the conglomeration of all the telecommunication technologies that make up our neoliberal network society, stretches out as its own representational nature. The Internet turns us loose from our physical realm. We rise above our physical world as representations of ourselves in an abstracted landscape.

In his updated reading of Marshal McLuhan, *Digital McLuhan*, Paul Levinson reminds us that new media (in this case the Internet) incorporates all previous media into its form. The Internet has become the ultimate incarnation of the telegraph, the radio, the telephone, and the television, taking all that has passed and fusing them together into the net space. In doing so, the Internet has become a new vision of our world. It is particularly telling that we refer to using the Internet as "getting online" or that we are going "onto the internet." It exists for us as another plane of existence as a collection of metaphorical spaces that we can get onto. The spiraling abstracted landscape of neoliberal network society has become as real to us as the physical world that it overlays. This is our new third nature.

McKenzie Wark tells us that with this representational nature comes the anxiety-producing effect of telesthesia, wherein "the movement of information [is] at a faster rate than things" (15). We

can speak to people on the other side of the world in an instant – hear their voices and see their faces with crystal clarity. We can journey in mediated form, seeing distant places we may never be able to see in our physical world. We have built a decentered world with the Internet. "We no longer have roots, we have aerials" (Wark 35). We don't have concrete destinations and pathways. We have vectors of telecommunication flows. Even as physical distance between us collapses in net space under the effect of telesthesia, the abstracted nature of our world can serve to alienate us from one another. This isolation becomes our equivalent of being-towards-death in the net space. Kaja Silverman reminds us "death is that one moment when each of us is irreducibly alone" (34). While this is not a literal version of death as we see in *The Walking Dead*, our Internet technology reveals relationships of separation from one another.

Just as Rick Grimes experiences a crisis of dwelling in *The Walking Dead*, we are in a crisis of how to dwell in the abstractions of net space. Rick wakes in a world stripped of all its centers, devoid of any concrete direction or destination. In an image of this, our third nature has flung us as a society into a landscape that has no definite centers. The decentered aspects of the Internet can be seen as far less dramatic versions of terrible places in *The Walking Dead*. "The Internet offers a cloak of anonymity, which often leads people to type things they would never say to someone's face" (Shaw 279). The Internet allows for an abstract removal of oneself from one's actions. In their article "Hate Speech in Cyberspace," Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic find that "the Internet has witnessed an increase in certain types of criminal behavior, including identity theft, threats, financial and consumer fraud and scams, hoaxes and pranks, and hacking – and others that are merely despicable. By this we mean behavior that decreases trust, weakens social bonds, or erodes quality of life" (320). These are less hyperbolic than the various "human crimes and perversions" that occur in the terrible place of a narrative like *The Walking Dead*, but they are aspects of this third nature that reveal a relationship of

divisiveness between us (Clover 31). Wark warns us, "Cultural differences cannot be preserved from the impact of telesthesia. New forms of difference are emerging out of the struggle with the vector" (37). A particular new form of difference comes from the effort to concretely separate one's centered space from the broader decentered spaces of third nature. On the Internet, we "struggle … for information space" and "every community 'deinformates' certain spaces within itself and creates certain barriers to the flow of information from without" (Wark 37). We want to separate – to insulate – ourselves from what lies outside. Still, Levinson finds that the Internet can bring us closer to one another. As the effects of telesthesia negate the physical distances between us, the world could be built in the image of a global village. We could be returned to the idea of community – of being-towards-others. We could be brought together by the same technology that threatens to divide us.

To the denizen of net space, the Internet comes as a collection of Internet sites, which are distinct spaces within this new landscape. They are informational spaces, as Wark would term them. Still, these sites are multitudinous – countless. So, even if we perceive of them as distinct spaces, the sheer scope and ambiguous scale of the Internet can be enough to produce an anxiety in us. We have any number of directions to take -- vectors to follow into the ever-expanding landscape of the net. However, there are Internet sites that each of us may return to with great frequency. After exploration in the swirling vectors of the Internet these are spaces to which we can return and – in a modification of Heidegger – remain in a digital place. Sites like Netflix to which users return with religious regularity become centered spaces for us within the anxiety-producing expanse of third nature. Netflix becomes an image of dwelling embodied on the Internet.

The most pertinent element in Netflix's role as a centering space in the Internet is the unprecedented level of control it lends to its users. This sensation is crucial in a landscape characterized by telesthesia where "many people" can feel "caught in a network of cultural

trajectories beyond their control" (Wark 36). Netflix allows the user to return to some perception of control in third nature. This comes as the culmination of decades of increasing user control over the media we view. In "Television's Next Generation," William Uricchio details the shift of television viewing from the static flow determined by television producers and advertisers to a flow determined by the empowered viewer. This began with the VCR and the remote control device. For the first time, viewers had the ability to record programs in order to watch them at their own leisure, and the remote control gave the ability to rapidly flip between program at the users whim. Uricchio states that the remote control "demonstrated from its start that viewers had the ability to disrupt program flow and thus the economic flow central to commercial television. At the same time, a new conception of viewer-dominated flow took hold" (171). Streaming sites like Netflix have become the culmination of viewer-dominated flow, which began with the VCR and remote control and progressed through the DVR and video on demand services. Amanda D. Lotz finds that sites like Netflix hold a similarity to watching "old episodes in syndication on a cable channel," but the incredible ability to access a show's entire "back-catalog" in one location is "more valued by viewers because they can watch episodes on their own schedule and in the order they desire" (147). The Netflix user has an unparalleled amount of choice over how and when to view content in this digital space. We can jump forward or back not just within a single episode but also within the entire scope of a series. This can be seen as an image of challenging-forth on the Internet. We only operate in isolated terms of what we desire. The increase of our individual freedoms can separate us from realizing the need for collective involvement.

Netflix can be seen as a distinct location within the amorphous vectors of the Internet. It is a space that can serve to foster some form of greater community for us in the abstract sprawl of third nature. Still, this hope is problematized by the relationships that the Internet reveals between us. Our

actual manner of being on the Internet lies in some negotiation of the centered and the decentered aspects of this landscape. This chapter will focus on two distinct facets of Netflix's interface: individual profiles and its feature of linking a user's Netflix account with the social media site Facebook. The Netflix profile can offer us a centered space within third nature. However, this space remains isolated and cut off from the greater expanse of the Internet. There can be no being-towards-others in this space. The linking of a Netflix account with Facebook begins to negotiate the centered space with the broader decentered world of the Internet. Though not as dramatic and high stakes as the community building in *The Walking Dead*, Netflix then has the potential to offer a site for being-towards-others: a gathering of like-minded individuals in projects of community.

Netflix Profiles: Isolated Centers

Netflix allows for multiple users to stream content under a single subscription. A family, for instance, can individually use Netflix under a single subscription. To facilitate personalization in such an instance, each user can create their own profile pursuant to their own tastes. In this aspect, we see a notable facet of our neoliberal system: the promotion of individual choice over collective involvement. Even within a single family who all use the same Netflix subscription, a member's individual profile serves to isolate them. Our Netflix profiles are a place to digitally dwell; they offer a space where we can remain in a distinct place within the vectors of third nature. In our state of telesthesia, Netflix offers the ability to feel as if we are actually in a particular place. We can even think that there is some form of building we undertake within our Netflix profile. We rate films and series to help build a taste profile for ourselves, and we can add titles to our queue, building up a list of potential titles to watch. Still, all of this is a solitary operation. We are isolated within our own profiles and our own tastes, removing ourselves from collective involvement. In *The Television Will*

Be Revolutionized, Amanda D. Lotz has noted that television has progressed from the mass collective audiences of its inception to exponentially more niche audiences. Whereas we once engaged in a kind of collective viewing, now, with the ability to watch what we want when we want, there is a diminished sense of this kind of communal viewership. The growth of our telecommunications technology has revealed a turn toward divided viewing habits.

We can view our state of individual being in the isolated nature of our Netflix profiles as an image of Rick's community in the prison of *The Walking Dead*. Just as Rick's community is content to isolate themselves from the larger decentered world, we can often be satisfied to remain walled off within our own centered space. The Netflix profile can be seen as its own form of digital prison: an attempt to separate the inside and the outside, the centered and the decentered. However, just as this schism is revealed as problematic in *The Walking Dead*, our attempts to institute a distinct divide between our centered spaces and the larger decentered world on the Internet prevents us from forging any sense of a broader community, any formation of a global village. Just as we can see the inability to concretely separate the centered space of the prison from the decentered spaces that surround it in *The Walking Dead*, our Netflix profile can never be completely isolated from what surrounds it. One way that this happens is through actions of its recommendation system of which we may not be actively aware. According to studies on Netflix's recommendation system (such as the articles written by An Zeng *et al.*, "Trend Prediction in Temporal Bipartite Networks: The Case of MovieLens, Netflix, and Digg," and Don Monroe's "Just for You"), Netflix uses a recommendation system in which titles are recommended to one profile based on what similar profiles have enjoyed. Even if it is an action that takes place largely unbeknownst to us, this betrays our own inability to ever separate our own centered space from what lies outside. Our Netflix profiles are in constant communication with one another, and we rely on this communication between our centered space and the outside.

Netflix's Vice President of Product Innovation, Todd Yellin, has said that a staggering "75 to 80 percent" of all titles viewed on Netflix come from recommendations made to its users. We stand to benefit from this interconnection between the inside of our own centered space and broader decentered spaces.

Netflix and the Potential for Broader Community

With Netflix's feature to connect an individual's Netflix profile with their Facebook profile, we can see the potential for broader community connection outside of our centered but isolated Netflix space. In this aspect of Netflix, we find a way to begin to negotiate the isolation of the centered space with the larger decentered spaces of third nature. This allows us the opportunity to reach out beyond our own boundaries. We can see what our network of mediated friends like to view, offering the potential to seek out like-minded individuals. We can gather around media of similar interest – a virtual version of being-towards-others. This can open avenues of discussion and connection and the possibility of forging communities around media with which groups engage. This doesn't offer a perfect vision of bringing-forth of the world as intended, because it still operates within the influence of the neoliberal system. However, it does offer a glimmer of hope, moving us away from the challenging-forth of media for our own enjoyment that we see in our individual Netflix profiles and towards a collective involvement: a being-towards-others centered around media objects.

While Netflix can be seen as the culminating evolution of the trend from mass viewership to increasingly niche audiences, it also seems to promise some expansion of mass viewership with its increasing production of original content. It becomes more likely that a larger group of people will watch a "Netflix Original" around the time that it debuts on Netflix. While the film or series may not

be watched at exactly the same time as it would have been in the early age of broadcast television, the likelihood of some version of a mass audience consuming the new product increases. The individual Netflix user consumes this content within the isolated sphere of their Netflix profile, but, if they so choose, they can then venture out to Facebook to commune with a broader populace that is viewing this new media. We can think of this as an image of what happens to Rick's community in Alexandria. As Rick's isolated community is brought into a larger communal sphere, so we can emerge from within the boundaries of our Netflix profiles and into a broader sense of community in third nature. Still, it remains questionable if this sense of community and being-towards-others can really expand into a global sense like that envisioned by McLuhan and Levinson. Even when we emerge from the individual space of our Netflix profile and onto Facebook, we only forge a sense of being-towards-others within the mediated friends we have chosen and avoid a broader sense of collective involvement in the world. We still have a reticence to acknowledge the need to negotiate the centered space with the broader decentered third nature. The technology of our third nature reveals our relationships as isolated, but we could stand to reorient ourselves toward each other, reaching out in projects of global community building.

Reorienting Ourselves through Artistic Media

Some may potentially find a sense of being-towards-others and projects of community building that center around televisual texts to be of trivial importance. However, within the world of the arts, we can find great power and potential. In "The Question Concerning Technology," Martin Heidegger details, "there was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name *techne*. Once the revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearance was also called techne. … The fine arts was also called techne" (339). Heidegger believes that the arts can fetch us

from the great dangers of technology. Art acts to reveal the world as it is; it operates in the unconcealment of truth. Forging communities around pieces of art (even popular art like *The Walking Dead* or other television series) can be seen as a great effort to reorient ourselves in terms of the relationships technology reveals. The communities that we form around art could stand to turn us toward a questioning of technology and the beginning of a bringing-forth of the primal truth: our interconnection and the need of being-towards-others in the world. If there is a way out of entrapment in our centered spaces and towards a negotiation with the decentered aspects of our world, appreciation and consideration of art like *The Walking Dead*, which reflects upon the state of the society that has created it, becomes essential. We can even think that the state of challenging-forth in which the characters of *The Walking Dead* are stuck could be rooted in the lack of artistic expression that exists in the apocalyptic world. In *The Walking Dead*, there is no time for the appreciation of art; there is no chance to reflect on the relationships that technology reveals. However, we have the ability to consider the relationships that technology engenders between us. We have the chance to stand outside of technological entrenchment and exist towards the unconcealment of truth: that all of us, as beings on the earth, are interconnected and should transform our existence into a great project of community building.

CONCLUSION

The apocalypse narrative has steadily been on the rise, particularly in its televisual form. In the 21st century, we have seen a veritable explosion of production and consumption of these stories. This should lead us to seriously contemplate the various aspects that can interest us in these narratives. Academics have analyzed textual representations of the apocalypse in a number of diverse and applicable ways, spanning the range of religious implications to the reflection of anxieties brought forth by a world perceived as spiraling into chaos. Many scholarly examinations of apocalypse narratives focus on the stark moments of global change that occurred in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. With the perpetual cycles of violence that we witness in apocalypse narratives like *The Walking Dead* and the amplified levels of our anxiety towards mortality, this is undeniably a factor in what can draw us to the apocalypse story. However, we should not ignore contemplating texts like *The Walking Dead* as hyperbolic images of the complexity that underlies our state of being-in-the-world.

The new century has also seen an unprecedented acceleration in our telecommunications technology. We have erected a vast-reaching and abstract third nature, which has left us, in many ways, adrift. We are stripped of our centers when we wander the strange new landscape of the Internet. The effect of telesthesia makes us feel neither here nor there, as information travels faster than physical objects. We can easily become directionless and disassociated from one another. We find ourselves wondering how to dwell and how to live in these circumstances. We seek out ways to feel grounded and centered. As the characters of *The Walking Dead* seek out their safe havens in

the apocalypse, we seek out our own centered spaces on the Internet. Netflix can be seen as a distinct informational space, which offers a centering effect within the vectors of telesthesia. However, there is a danger here to ignore the outside. We risk retreating into isolation and turning away from broader collective involvement. Martin Heidegger believes that there is an opportunity to transform life into a great project of the unconcealment of primal truth, which comes as a revealing of all beings' interconnection in the world. The greatest centering effect will always be in the community – the sense of being-towards-others in the world – fostered in these spaces. We find our anxieties – towards alienation and death – alleviated in the act of dwelling and fostering community, as we acknowledge the inevitability of our deaths and work to transform life into a great project. In the landscape of third nature, this could come in the potential to truly erect Marshall McLuhan's global village and foster a sense of worldwide community.

Technology has become integrally intertwined into our lives. Heidegger details that technology serves to reveal the nature of being-in-the-world. Modern technology has led us to challenge-forth the world. The emphasis on individual choice over collective involvement engendered by neoliberalism has oriented us into viewing the world only in terms of what it can give to us. We are too often content to isolate ourselves within our centered spaces and attempt to ignore their interconnection with the decentered spaces that lie outside. Even in the technological remnants that exist in the apocalypse, we see a similarity to our own society in the relationships that technology reveals between the characters of *The Walking Dead*. These characters could rebuild the world in a better image of itself: a world where we can be brought together in a greater sense of community. However, technology reveals relationships of isolation. We see the beginning of community building within centered spaces, but there is still the inability to recognize the integral connection with the decentered aspects of the world. While people come together in the face of the

anxiety of being-towards-death, part of the threat of death comes relentlessly from other communities of survivors who are also challenging-forth the world. The apocalypse narrative often becomes problematic in this respect. It too frequently portrays cyclical relationships of violence as the only option available to us. It only offers the view that we must remain as a people perpetually divided. However, it can reveal to us our own states of isolation in third nature, our own propensity to ignore our interconnections with the broader world.

Moving Forward

The apocalypse narrative provides a wealth of topics that are prime for analysis. An investigation into one aspect of these stories will inevitably open doors to further areas of inquiry. While this investigation has restricted itself to the concept of being-towards-others and relationships revealed by technology, it is impossible to ignore the many additional questions it raises. If we are to ever fully comprehend our society's not only lasting but also apparently accelerating interest in the apocalypse narrative, we should endeavor to move forward in a continued analysis of these stories.

In this investigation, we have looked at the propensity for characters to engage in a challenging-forth of the world in the apocalypse narrative. This could even lead to Heidegger's ultimate fear in *The Question Concerning Technology*: that even people could come to be regarded as standing-reserve -- as just another piece of beneficial material. This touches on a broad area that is ripe for analysis, conjuring thoughts of Michel Foucault's emphasis on the growth of biopolitics wherein people are viewed less as human objects and more in terms of how they materially operate and are subjected by political apparatuses. With other people viewed mostly in terms of how they can benefit our own survival in the apocalypse narrative, the apocalyptic landscape seems aptly

suited to a Foucauldian analysis, looking at how people have become viewed as material in modern society.

This investigation has focused on just one form that the apocalypse narrative takes: televisual media. However, it is impossible to ignore the growth of interest in the apocalypse in other areas. The world of video games has also been caught up in this explosion of interest. The video game has also been rising in prominence as a new interactive form of legitimate storytelling. This seems to be a rich area ready for in depth analysis. While video games have also become larger and grander narrative productions, another aspect of them have also become smaller in the mobile games that can fill up our phones. *The Walking Dead* has its own mobile game, which can further immerse a fan in the narrative world of the series. Just as *The Walking Dead* series can now come with us in our pockets, we now have the ability to access an interactive version of its world wherever we are, opening a host of potential analytical questions. It is possible that the interactive nature of a video game's narrative could alter our perceptions of it. We could begin to view the carefully constructed worlds of video games as their own distinct spaces in third nature. These are spaces where we could potentially digitally dwell with even greater choice and interactivity than spaces like Netflix can provide on the Internet.

The most pressing subject that demands further investigation in the apocalypse narrative is its focus on violence. *The Walking Dead* may be the most graphically violent series on television. It consistently shows its viewers levels of blood and gore that wouldn't have even been allowed on the air of regular cable just ten years ago. It is also the most popular series on regular cable, which poses its own interesting question. Is part of *The Walking Dead*'s success rooted in its propensity towards and willingness to display horrific acts of detailed violence? If this is the case, what does it say about us as a people and as a society? This investigation has criticized *The Walking Dead* for

portraying a world that can only be locked in violent conflict. Still, it may be possible that this is

exactly the kind of narrative most viewers demand. We may have some grim fascination with and

attraction to sensational acts of televisual violence.

Questioning

We may find the prospects of the apocalypse narrative disheartening, and the way they

reflect on our own pre-apocalyptic world even more so. Violence seems to be the only certainty –

an inevitability. Still, this is only one possibility that is being shown to us, and we would be foolish

to accept this without question. Once again, we can turn to Heidegger's thought for guidance. In

Building Dwelling Thinking and *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger comes to similar

points of conclusion. It is necessary to continue thinking and questioning. Whether this is a

questioning toward the nature of technology or a continuance of thought on the nature of our being

in the world, we must continue to think and to question if we are to progress as beings on this earth

and if we are to bring forth the primal truth of our interconnection. *The Walking Dead* shows us a

world where there is little room to contemplate the effects of one's actions. In his investigation of

technology, Heidegger finds that art can offer a way to reorient ourselves towards one another. Art

becomes an avenue for the unconcealment of the primal truth. In the way that popular art like *The*

Walking Dead reflect on our own world, we can begin to realize the faults that exist in our own

manner of being-in-the-world. While *The Walking Dead* presents a hyperbolic version of the plight

of dwelling in a decentered world, it can be seen as an image of our own problematic existence

within neoliberal network society. By engaging with works like *The Walking Dead*, we can see an

unconcealment of truth regarding our existence. Thinking about the divisive relationships that

technology reveals between characters in *The Walking Dead* can turn us to inquire into our own

relationships of separation from the broader world.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Fair Use Worksheet for *The Walking Dead* Figures

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