**A taxonomy of ‘zombie space’ for walking in monstrous cities**

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**Abstract**

This paper describes the assembling of a taxonomy of ‘zombie space’, consisting of categories of fictional urban space drawn from zombie films and other expressions of a living dead ‘mythos’, and presents a provisional set of these categories. The paper places this assembling in the context of the use of taxonomies in alternative ambulatory practices such as the Dadaist de-ambulation, the situationist dérive, and contemporary ‘walking as art’ practices. It concludes by describing the problems, specifically the paucity of theoretical detail and the lack of practical models, faced in the deployment of such a taxonomy when moving beyond an observational or experiential walk to one that is part of the construction of ‘situations’.

Key Words

Psychogeography ~ Mythogeography ~ Living dead ~ Zombie movies ~ Monsters ~ Dérive ~ Situations ~ Taxonomy ~ Walking

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1. Disrupted walking

In 2006 I advocated a practice of aesthetic-activist urban walking in relation to the shamble of the living dead. I presented this argument in a paper to the European Nightmares conference at Manchester Metropolitan University.1 In describing what might constitute such a walking I drew on ambulatory traditions that included the de-ambulations of the Dadaists, the situationist *dérive* and other contemporary walking-as-art practices, all the time mindful of the potency of zombie shamblings, wanders, millings, herds and sudden pursuits as useful models for a disrupted pedestrianism.

I was already involved in alternative forms of ambulatory practise as an extension of making site-specific performances with artists collective Wrights & Sites. Anxious that the theatre we produced often hid rather than illuminated the sites we worked in, Wrights & Sites used walking as a means for engaging with urban and ‘edgeland’ environments without overwhelming or obfuscating them. We drew on a heightened sensitivity from walking *as if* seeking sites for performance, and this walking became a resource for making ambulatory performances (including ‘mis-guided tours’), for fanciful maps and for handbooks (‘mis-guides’) to help others make their own explorations of everyday space.

Around the time that I gave the paper at Manchester, I devised a tactic for the Wrights & Sites handbook of playful walking, ‘A Mis-Guide To Anywhere’.2 Readers are invited to walk their streets as ‘Barbara’, the character from George Romero‘s ‘Night of the Living Dead’ (1968) who abruptly finds herself pursued by re-animated, flesh-devouring corpses:

Move through crowds without giving yourself away. Observe the dead and their places covertly... Wherever you go make sure you know the escape routes... Study movies for tactics. Avoid malls. And gated communities. The domestic is a hungry tomb. Survive by moving. Join in expressions of collective desire.3

I have often used this tactic as a model task for undergraduate students studying site-based performance for the first time; those taking the role of ‘Barbara’ have often reported vivid experiences, describing sensations of ‘otherness’ and the emergence of a bleak and apocalyptic urban landscape.

Over recent years I have deployed this zombie-related, paranoid walking as a means to prepare ambulatory performances. In addition to walking in relation to the walk of the living dead – using imagined threats and a more general sense of ‘dread’ as the means to perceiving otherwise elusive patterns, textures and atmospheres – I have begun to assemble and draw upon a taxonomy of ‘zombie spaces’ (a process I had already begun in relation to’ non-zombie’ space).4 These are categories of monstrous space assembled from zombie movies, comics and literature (in the provisional taxonomy below they are primarily from movies), which I then use to identify particular spaces encountered on an ambulatory urban exploration; drawing on the social, political, critical-theoretical and psychological resonance of a living dead ‘mythos’ to inform the findings of a walk.

2. Categories of ‘zombie space’

The categories of my particular taxonomy of ‘zombie space’ follow mythogeographical principles of multiplicity,5 describing generic subjects that are both abstract and material; spaces or trajectories with approximate or speculative commonalities (architectural, geological, social, fictional or ambient) and comparable atmospheric tendencies or affordances. They address spaces for which ‘[T]axonomies only extend the vocabulary for *speaking* a way through’,6 assembling categories that require constant re-assemblage, attention to the changes in their globalised mythic source, and refinements in the walking of the spaces categorised: ‘navigated with a certain lightness of foot; quickness of the land met with quickness of wit, sharpness of eye’.6 These volatile, speculative and variegated categories, combining abstract, fictional and material qualities, are far from unique; similar reflexive categories of space include the ‘Dreaming Rooms’ of Robert Harbison,8 the utopian urban quarters of Gilles Ivain9 and Marc Augé’s ‘non-places’.10

A taxonomy of such categories can alert the wanderer to kinds of space with particular narratives, atmospheres or affordances, encourage a more focused examination, and enable an appropriate imagining as a tool to provoking the spaces themselves to perform. Such categories can inform an urban praxis through their fictional or ideal signifier; the living dead ‘mythos’; narrated, always in the process of refinement, in the walker’s mind, affording an ‘apocalyptic revelation’ of the city’s possibilities; the abject narratives, stagings and metaphors of the mythos can then inform the making of practical-aesthetic interventions and *détournements*. At the same time, such enhanced explorations can refine existing and add new categories to the taxonomy.

3. A provisional taxonomy of ‘zombie space’

a/ The first fifteen minutes of Zack Snyder’s 2004 remake of ‘Dawn of the Dead’ offer a glimpse of what a geographical living dead movie might look like. The city is stripped back, laid out and mapped in an excess of motion. The film starts where Lamberto Bava’s ‘Demons 2’ (1986) ends; with a liberation into the everyday life of a city transformed by acceleration. This opening portrays an ecstatic city in which the drive of hunger is released at an urban, dromological tempo. The abrupt zombie reanimations have the feel of urban exchanges. A car driven by the film’s central character – Ana, a nurse – is chased for a moment by a sprinting zombie, who abruptly peals away to fasten on the tail of a living person running by on foot. Rather than shambling mall grazers, here is a virulent, hunger-fuelled, disastrous market up on its feet and running around; intuitive, grasping, grabbing, biting, chasing, and changing its mind. This is free-market extreme, choice without concern for consequences.

Out of this apparent chaos, the camera lifts back and up, high above the city, and we see for a moment how the fears, appetites and violence are channelled and charging along the neat ground plan of the city. What we might imagine to be the discipline and structure of policed space is also the conduit for its destruction – an *ecstatic grid*.

b/ Marvin Kren’s ‘Rammbock: Berlin Undead’ (‘Siege of the Dead’), released in 2010, is confined almost entirely to a handful of flats around a shared courtyard in Berlin. The movie is an intimate, even romantic one, with a sense of containment and a setting that owe something to Alfred Hitchcock’s ‘Rear Window’ (1954).

The courtyard is the key space around and through which everything is contested: battles over (and commerce in) scarce resources, the struggle to secure boundaries, the strained performance of relationships. Always in danger of invasion from the street, the courtyard is a space of leverage, by and across which the living residents manipulate and negotiate with each other; deceptively anonymous and stage-like. A space that is hungry for association and presence.

At the start of the film, Michael arrives at the courtyard by taxi. A young man from a small provincial town, he is abruptly plunged into a volatile metropolis, experienced obliquely through media broadcasts and intimately through disturbing personal events. Even before apocalyptic events intrude, the domesticity of the flats is ambiguous. Michael has come to seek reconciliation with his ex-girlfriend, Gabi, but she is not at home. Instead, there are plumbers at work there, a kind of invasion and replacement: the indifference of alienated work substituting for erotic rapprochement. One of these plumbers turns predatory.

The TV says ‘stay in your homes’; but the residents are no longer ‘at home’ in them. The uncertainty of the courtyard, with its public/private ambiguity, has entered the interiors of the flats. Across the space of the courtyard and inside the individual flats – partly visible to their neighbours through the courtyard windows – the residents’ relationships and personae decompose. A man hides an infected wife, a resident commits suicide, another heroically but foolishly endangers himself, a coward goads others into risking their lives, a son is pursued into the courtyard by his infected mother.

To survive predation from the horde of living dead sweeping through the streets and the infiltration of domestic places from within, the surviving characters de-compose the social and physical architecture of their flats, worming their way up through the building. Somewhat like the residents, fire fighters and media crew of the similarly located ‘Rec’ (2007), the characters of ‘Rammbock: Berlin Undead’ transgress private spaces, climbing higher and higher within their building as if it might hold an explanatory or expiatory secret in its attic. What is revealed there, however, is not a feral super-ego or religio-scientific ‘answer’, but, bathetically, the compromised object of Michael’s desultory desire: his ex-girlfriend and her new partner.

Apparently animated by disappointment, Michael heroically engineers an escape for two characters, but then returns to the flats rather than save himself. Gabi is waiting for him in the courtyard; not for reconciliation, but predation. She is living dead. Michael does not run; the courtyard’s hunger for intrigue prevails. Michael’s only way back to intimacy with his ex-girlfriend is to share in her very public infection in the centre of the courtyard. The apocalypse forces painful personal inadequacies and self-destructive private desires into public space; any hope of an intense, romantic, private utopia is taken into public ownership in the hungry space of *the voracious courtyard*.

c/ Le Corbusier’s ‘vertical streets’, those blocks of flats with their stairs, lifts, maintenance rooms and crawlspaces, have long served as potent spaces of horror. Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher’s 2009 movie ‘The Horde’ politicises that space. Set in a run-down Parisian suburb, its high rise location is a living museum of colonial history and neo-colonial attitudes. With a zombie holocaust in full swing outside, the threatened interior of the block becomes a space of frantic negotiation between a rogue unit of cops out for revenge and their targets, a partly African gang who have turned the tables on the cops and taken them prisoner. The criminals, with roots in France’s former colonies, and the predominantly white police squad weave their way through the high rise labyrinth and around each other, negotiating a barely sustainable alliance. Their shared apocalyptic predicament is insufficient to banish their differences, but instead reveals the deep, intimate qualities and resilience of those differences, in accord with Evan Calder Williams’ idea of apocalypse (as distinct from catastrophe) bringing revelation:

An apocalypse is an end with revelation, a “lifting of the veil”.... the possibility of grasping how the global economic order and its social relations depend upon the production and exploitation of the undifferentiated, of those things which cannot be included in the realm of the openly visible without rupturing the very oppositions that make the whole enterprise move forward.11

At the centre of the *contested labyrinth* of ‘The Horde’, the unstable cop-criminal gang finds a symbolic monster: a reclusive, axe-dragging veteran of France’s involvement in Vietnam. Locked in delusion, the veteran personifies a sclerotic fixing and repeating of the past. Around and beyond his monstrous, predatory nostalgia, the survivors fight their way to the bottom of the high rise block. In contrast to the monster, they interrogate their pasts as they go, ‘discussing’ (usually in the form of hurled abuse) neo-colonial politics in Africa and their motives for crime, violence and revenge. Spatially, rhetorically and ideologically they are struggling towards some fundamental, shared ground level beyond the enclosed space of the labyrinth.

The prospect of a reconciliation on the ‘level playing field’ of species solidarity is ended when, breaking out of the labyrinth (the constrictions of which have cramped enemies into some consideration of mutuality), the one surviving cop abruptly executes the one surviving gangster. The suddenness of this murder (the completion of a revenge and the return of an attitude that had both seemed increasingly obsolete and irrelevant) contrasts sharply with the transitory, tentative, opportunistic, uneasy, violent but real collaborations inside the maze. This silencing of the neo-colonial question is suicidal; the gunshot attracts the ravenous horde.

d/ While a contested maze can produce unlikely companions, enforcing (in the fantasy of revelation) a liberalising cosmopolitanism, it may also hide *a lair of reactionary intensity*. Finding your way to somewhere in the apocalyptic labyrinth can be more dangerous than getting lost in it. In Romero’s ‘Night of the Living Dead’ (1968) an apparently abandoned refuge shelters a destructive and regenerating nuclear family, the attic in ‘Rec²’ (2009) is ‘home’ to a mutant, physicalised theology, while in ‘The Road’ (2009) – a film with similarities to the Romero-esque zombie movie – a father and son are urged by one of the naked wretches kept as food in a locked basement to ‘wait! wait’, grabbing the father’s leg: ‘you get used to it!’ It is in Taiwan’s first zombie movie, however, that a monstrous lair appears to ‘top’ the rest for abjection; one that even threatens to unravel the generic qualities of the living dead movie itself.

‘Zombie 108’ (2012) begins in Romero-esque mode: a young woman, Linda, wakes at the wheel of a crashed car, a dead man beside her. From the child-seat in the back her daughter is missing. Searching desperately, Linda enters a supermarket where she surprises the orgiastic consumption of a human victim in one of the aisles. A chase by lumbering living dead ensues. Linda sees and grabs her child, and they seem to be making their escape with the help of a passing motorist, when the classic narrative falls apart. The mother and child have leaped into the car of a porn toting, cadaverous, human predator and are being driven to his ‘lair’.

Before we see the lair, ‘Zombie 108’ flashes back to pre-apocalyptic scenes of orgiastic consumption: a gangster boss surrounded by young, naked women. Writhing around his body, they fondle rather than tear, bending together to snort cocaine rather than bite chunks from flesh (though the similarity is clear). The gangster is called away, taking the narrative momentum with him, and the camera lingers in a sustained manner on the women’s bodies. The classic Romero sensibility is traduced. The morbid moral compass of the apocalypse is unhinged. Any remnant of the cold, distanced, pseudo-documentary style of the originary living dead movie fragments, and as if having disconnected its own motor, the film treads water.

Eventually, Romero-esque elements reappear, however: a gangster-police conflict/co-operation similar to ‘The Horde’, a predatory TV reporter gets her comeuppance, the inability to co-operate is exposed as violent stupidity, an SOS sign is constructed from hundreds of corpses. Just as the moral and aesthetic compass seems to be steadying, young, naked female bodies appear once more: victims imprisoned in the cellar of the rapist-monster’s flat. There he has erected a treadmill, worked by chained zombie males, providing him with an independent energy source. The zombie apocalypse may have barely begun outside, but in the boss-rapist-monster’s lair an apocalypse of gender and labour exploitation has long been in progress.

The movie draws its survivors, inexorably, through the labyrinth of Taipei, to the lair, where grossly reactionary gender and labour slavery-politics have been frozen. These lairs – another example is Dr. Logan’s laboratory in ‘Day of the Dead’ (1985) – distil the living dead ‘mythos’ of exploitation, slavery, de-humanisation and unrestricted consumption; the lair in ‘Zombie 108’ sexualises the synthesis. The rapist-boss-monster injects a bound living woman with infection so he can rape a zombie (an idea already proposed as a joke in an earlier scene by a supposedly non-monstrous man). The movie externalises the fantasy of violent drive expressed without conscience or empathy that Evan Calder Williams detects as constituent of the fictional zombie itself: ‘a secret communal fantasy of nastiness toward our fellow human... the zombie film lets us bare our open secret and celebrate in it’.12

The cadaverous rapist-boss (the film’s ‘gangsta’ excess stripped of its thin disguises of ‘humour’, ‘business’ and ‘glamour’) places raw meat on his pocked face. He is as if dead. His consuming is morbidly ‘erotic’, a mythic manifestation of ‘the overwhelming urge to obtain total physical bodily pleasure from other humans’13 with complete indifference. He may be like the gangster boss in that he exploits others, but is devoid of the cowardice, self-serving emotionality and childishness that define the boss’s ‘humanity’. Linda, kidnapped, asks the monster: ‘don’t you have any humanity left?’ The answer is ‘no’. This is a human without humanity, living but unalive to anything but his miserable drives, ‘as inhuman on the inside as you are on the outside’ says one of his victims. He is a living-zombie, a raping and enslaving category, satisfying socially-disconnected hunger in a travesty of extreme neo-liberalism (he rants about the waste of taxpayers’ money on subsidies for art films). As such he threatens to drive out the ‘star’ of the Romero-esque genre; unveiled, for Simon Clark, in Dr. Logan’s laboratory: ‘human instinct [is] the true star of [Romero’s] films’.14 The ‘Zombie 108’ human monster threatens the fantastical-metaphorical presence of the living dead by manifesting, in life, the violent drives that the living dead sublimate and legitimise in their pseudo-death. It is only the humans who arrive at the lair in ‘Zombie 108’ who can put an end to the monster’s inhumanity within humanity; the living dead cannot negate him without negating themselves. He is ‘them’ made too much like ‘us’. He brings to a crisis a tendency within the living dead ‘mythos’, from the dead Johnny attacking his sister in ‘Night of the Living Dead’, the intuitive gathering of the dead at the mall in ‘Dawn of the Dead’ (1978) via Bub’s returning memory in ‘Day of the Dead’ (1985) to those wishful poems in ‘Aim For The Head’ (2011) in which the writers fantasise their return as living dead to feast upon the lovers that jilted them or the families that confined them: the erosion, from both sides, of the difference between the living and the fictional living dead.

Destroying the monster temporarily ‘saves’ the movie, but the lair responds. Generic, greater than any single resident, the human-monster’s destruction flushes out more of the lair’s kind: a serial killer hiding among the survivors murders the cop who recognises him and the gangster boss ‘turns’, bloating up into an absurd super-zombie like the cartoon-transformations in ‘Planet Terror’ (2007) or the mutant man-monster of ‘Resident Evil 3: Nemesis’ (game, 1999). These lairs of reactionary intensity generate their own violence and humourless surreality (a cannibals’ victim advocating their own situation as if ideology personified, a young girl devouring her father, Bub ‘reading’ Stephen King); they have an ‘alternative’ irrationality that both mirrors and negates the ‘conventional’ apocalypse/revelation raging outside. In ‘Zombie 108’ the eruption of the lair’s absurdity seems to render the film’s apocalyptic narrative unsustainable. A crisis of ‘mythos’ short circuits the ‘dramatization of the struggle that exists between civilized individuals and their own repressed instincts’15 and the city of Taipei returns, suddenly and absurdly, to normality in a single explosion of brains and blood, as if the whole thing were, comfortingly, the delusion of a single mind requiring a single shot from an army rifleman.

Whether the uncomfortable ambiguities of ‘Zombie 108’ are due to its unevenness or an obscure manipulation of the viewer is unclear. The director, Joe Chien, grasps at different materials to create a disturbing lair of reactionary intensity that threatens to over-consume the over-consumption of the genre itself. In ‘The Horde’ the lair is intellectually fascinating: the refuge of a social coelacanth, a suggestion that colonialist politics have continued beneath the surface, in the deep memory of the white working class at the fossilised heart of a diverse urban labyrinth. (A similar reactionary working class nostalgia emerges, triumphal and palaeontological, at the end of ‘Cockneys vs Zombies’ [2012]). In ‘Zombie 108’, however, the lair is reflexive; it suggests that what drives *our* enjoyment of these movies is a pleasure intensified by their invitation to do so in complete indifference to the feelings of others. As online reviewer Tony Cockles remarks of the episodes in the lair: ‘these scenes are filmed almost with a comedic edge to them, which makes them all the more repugnant’.16 ‘Zombie 108’ takes the Eros/Thanatos dynamic that Simon Clark proposes as constituent of the living dead movie,17 turns it inside out and throws it in the audience’s face. When the online reviewer Pierce Conran describes the movie as ‘misogynistic, apathetic and clearly demonstrates that the filmmakers couldn’t give a damn about their audience’,18 it is hard not to agree, and yet it is exactly this antipathy that has added something unusual and unsettling to the genre. As Linda drives an axe into his groin, the monster says, apparently indifferent to his own pain: ‘the end of the world’. In his mind the universe is over when the drive to sexual violence is ended; there is nothing after and other than that. Either by clumsiness, indifference, misogyny or a rather too obscure blend of the banal and the critical, Joe Chien has conjured up a rather more toxic vision than he perhaps intended; by combining zombies with a living-morbid/erotic-super-zombie he has infected the whole damned form with a self-negating virus located in a lair of reactionary intensity, signalling what now threatens to destroy the classic ‘mythos’ in an over-production of unreflexive, gory self-gratifications, to which the living spectator is invited as something more monstrous than their screen avatar.

e/ In Bruce McDonald’s 2008 movie ‘*Pontypool*’, set in an isolated radio studio, language is depredated. Speech becomes unspeakable. Rather than the bites of re-animated corpses, infection comes from biting remarks. The very sociability of the characters threatens to transform them into anti-social creatures. Only by inverting the conventions of that sociability – with a little help from Barthes – by disrupting the gap between signifier and signified and by making an effective, functioning non-sense of language and a meaningful nonsense of their own delicate and nascent relationship, can the heroes survive. So ‘kill isn’t kill... kill is kiss’, says the radio host Grant Mazzy to Sydney, his infected producer, who, cured by Mazzy’s inversion, replies: ‘kill me’... and they kiss.

Language, specifically English, here, stands for those signifiers (or perhaps the accumulation of them in a spectacularised media-drenched sociability) that exceed their signifieds and threaten to overwhelm all meaning. In *Pontypool*’s radio station, to which the movie is mostly confined (as if to underline the Society of the Spectacle metaphor), we at first appear to be on very familiar zombie territory: the enclosed haven, the house with nailed shutters, the locked and barricaded mall. A space that, once sealed off against mobs of the living dead, represents both a utopian opportunity and the trap that ruins its chances. An invitation to start human society again, from scratch, with all the advantages and disadvantages of limits and exclusions.

These bounded spaces have always posed problems for a zombie ‘mythos’ predicated on a future virtually without humans; once the survivors stop moving, utopian responsibility comes crashing down on shoulders always over-burdened with representativeness. The ensuing displacement of abstract hope into social melodrama – as in the hot-housed character dramas of Romero’s first three living dead movies, becalmed in house, mall and underground bunker – offers little new to a fictional world in which the audience for such ‘soap opera’ consists of reanimated corpses: the more ‘real’ (naturalistic, psychological) the action is, the less capable it is of breaking out of the fantasy it travesties. Collapse – of utopia, movie, or both – follows, if not always swiftly and without ennui.

The main characters in ‘Pontypool’ are similarly besieged; yet evade the melodrama by deconstructing and dispersing it. For their bunker is a porous one. The virus of language pours in and out; for a while even outside guests come and go. Later, as the catastrophe intensifies and the station becomes a shelter, the survivors broadcast to and, at some risk to themselves, in dialogue with those still outside. Perhaps uniquely, ‘Pontypool’ is more interested in tearing apart the displacement activity of the survivors than tearing apart their bodies. What is usually taken for granted as the necessary and inevitable drama of conflict among human beings under threat (and the ‘necessary’ material for any drama) is, unusually, exposed as the real monster. Instead, much of the action is reported: the viewer is invited to actively imagine the landscapes and trajectories of the infected world outside the immediate ‘stage’ of the radio station. In the opening scenes the landscape is hidden in flurries of snowfall; the viewers must construct this terrain for themselves. Later, a traffic reporter phones in a bird’s eye view, but it is revealed that he is speaking from his car, pretending to be in a helicopter – a subversion of the familiar overhead shots of zombies spread out across the fields from movies like ‘Nightmare City’ (1980) – and once more the viewers must construct the outside action. An eyewitness vividly describes the flocking of the infected around a doctor’s surgery, but then even such descriptive vocabulary itself is rendered questionable by the high-pitched “*eeeeee! eeeeee!*“ of an infected victim’s involuntary imitation of the squeak of a windscreen wiper. Imitation and representation are not enough to escape infection. When the action inside the radio station becomes melodramatic, as in the scene where the radio host Grant Mazzy ‘talks round’ Sydney, his infected producer, the drama defies its own form by dialoguing with it, by forcing it into the open; the scene is between two characters and their infected, over-heated, structural language. The infectious ideology of naturalistic characterisation and pseudo-psychological melodrama, the zombie in the room, is outed and fore-fronted for once.

In Charlie Brooker’s TV mini-series, ‘Dead Set’ (2008), the Big Brother House is quickly overrun by the living dead and goes ‘dead’ – technically and politically. It is about as morbid a utopian project as it is possible to imagine: the future is in the hands of stereotyped mediatised working class ‘characters’ and their deeply cynical ‘producers’, turned in upon cultural resources shorn of the spectacle that sustains them. In ‘Pontypool’, on the other hand, the broadcasts and the programme-makers, are still live (alive, critical and still broadcasting), and continue to reach outwards and beyond themselves. Through and from their *porous bunker*, the characters listen to messages from far away, speak to people they can neither see nor identify, yet empathise with; once the zombie apocalypse has conferred both utopian and refuge/fortress statuses upon their space, they do all they can to dissolve its utopian walls and exclusions without destroying themselves. Despite some character clichés (the troubled radio host who softens) there is a broad democratic impulse in ‘Pontypool’ (for all the cleverness of its nods to critical theory). It is, in the classical sense, a comedy, and the spatiality of its porous bunker, is benevolent and vivacious.

f/ Briefly, among other spatial categories might be the (apparently) deserted but*dread cityscapes*of Fort Myers from ‘Day of the Dead’ (1985), London in the early scenes of ‘28 Days Later’ (2002) and Atlanta, Georgia in the first episode of TV series ‘The Walking Dead’ (2010–) or the categorically-explicit*workplaces of dead-labour* of ‘Plague of the Zombies’ (1966) and ‘The Zombie Farm’ (2009).

In Bruce LaBruce’s hardcore gay porn-zombie flick ‘LA Zombie’ (2010) - tagline: ‘He Came To Fuck The Dead Back To Life’ - the dead are victims not of an exceptional apocalypse but an everyday one of urban inequality, competition and exploitation: gang violence, business disputes, indifference to the homeless, and car crashes. Small theatres of violence – a bondage club room, a streetside tent – are like bad theatrical or porn-movie sets where the victims of these violences are reanimated in a sexual resurrection by the blood spitting penis of a strange alien-zombie (who just may be the hallucination of a homeless schizophrenic). Over-long and repetitive ‘set-piece’ scenes (as distended as the monster’s organ) disrupt the morbid drive of the urban narrative with porn *longueur*; the rush of the city’s everyday violence is halted and contained on *stages of healing and transformation*.

At the start of ‘28 Days Later’, Cillian Murphy wanders a London de-familiarised by its stillness and stumbles upon an evocative ‘installation’ on Westminster Bridge: a large, scattered pile of Big Ben souvenirs. Nearby, a red bus is laid on its side. Supposedly these are spillages from accident, flight, or violence, but these images are too familiar (even if we have never seen them, yet still we expect them) and artful. They are parts of what Jean Baudrillard has described as ‘a set of signs dedicated exclusively to their recurrence as signs’;19 yet here and in other living dead contexts these *sets of signs* can be *stopped dead*, distracted from their frenetic reproduction by their own simulation and held up for examination; then, for a frozen moment, the mechanics of urban accident, coincidence and spontaneity are disrupted/exposed as subject to the social relations of a spectacle.

So, the beginnings of a taxonomy: negotiable and affordant labyrinths, porous bunkers, ecstatic grids, voracious courtyards, the lairs of intense reactionary attitudes, tendentious and reparatory movie sets, factories of prematurely ‘dead labour’ and sets of signs frozen like interrupted machines.

4. Using the taxonomy

A taxonomy of ‘zombiespace’, while perhaps novel in supplying categories from living dead fictions, is far from unusual in aesthetic, critical and activist walking. The *dérive* of the International Lettristes (IL/SI), a tactic devised in the 1950s and retained (at least notionally) by them as they reconstituted themselves with others as the Situationist International (against which, or in sympathy with which, most aesthetic, critical and activist walkers will define themselves at some time or another) is at least partly the assembling of just such a taxonomy. The *dérive* consists of a destinationless wander through a city subjecting it to a psychogeographical enquiry. While beginning with a necessary random quality, the *dérive* was never intended as primarily spontaneous, informal or chance-based. Far more significant to the IL/SI was the ‘necessary contradiction’ of such spontaneous ‘letting-go’ through

the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities. In this latter regard, ecological science.... provides psychogeography with abundant data.... of the absolute or relative character of fissures in the urban network, of the role of microclimates, of distinct neighbourhoods.... and above all the dominating action of centers of attraction.20

It was in pursuance of just such a ‘domination’ that Gilles Ivain suggested the reconstruction (*détournement*) of existing and identifiable ‘psychogeographical variations’ into categories: ‘Bizarre Quarter – Happy Quarter (specially reserved for habitation) – Noble and Tragic Quarter (for good children) – Historical Quarter (museums, schools) – Useful Quarter (hospital, tool shops) – Sinister Quarter, etc.’.21

For the IL/SI the *dérive* was an expedition for identifying and collecting affordant space among the city’s ‘constant currents, fixed points and vortexes’22 in, from and for which to construct ‘situations’ (exemplary and prefigurative revolutionary behaviours); this is quite different to many subsequent and contemporary uses of the term *dérive* (sometimes translated as ‘drift’) to describe a random wander with no outcome but its own pleasures or to other, superficially similar, walking practices like Nick Papadimitriou’s ‘deep topography’ which are ‘concerned primarily with the experience of place, not its description’.23

Despite these important distinctions (sometimes blurred for the sake of descriptive convenience, sometimes in order for a group or individual to stake some claim to the authoritative precedent of the situationist *dérive*), adventures in an ‘archaeology of now’ at least similar in part to the IL/SI’s *dérive* (if rarely with the same revolutionary intents) continue to be deployed by a wide range of disrupted walkers. The flâneur-guide Shawn Micallef describes a process of researching and describing simultaneously material and fictional information in Toronto as ‘recovering the deep, enduring traces of our inhabitation by encountering directly the fabric of buildings and the legends we have built there’.24 Damian Brennan describes how in performing *manoeuvres* Tim Brennan appropriates existing categories by his use of quotation on his walks:‘[T]he codes of architecture and the schemata of town planning can be foregrounded as themselves “quotations” or “texts” embedded in discursive practices: hospital, shop, school, asylum, morgue, alleyway, wasteland’ .25 John R. Stilgoe, an advocate of quotidian-exploration, emphasises the validity of the subjective in category-making:

Discovering bits and pieces of peculiar, idiosyncratic importance in ordinary metropolitan landscapes scrapes away the deep veneer of programmed learning... Making some idiosyncratic pattern of the bits and pieces shatters the veneer and enables the walker.... to navigate according to landmarks and inklings and constellations wholly personal. Abandoned commercial gatehouses, outcroppings of igneous rock, maybe first and second rate ice cream stores.... become a skein into which new fragments fall into place.26

The Office for Soft Architecture prefer ‘descriptions’ to ‘categories’, but their ‘mostly critical dreams, morphological thefts, authentic registers of pleasant customs, accidents posing as intentions’27 are very similar to the kinds of categories used in this essay’s taxonomy. Similarly the following categories deployed by a range of site-specific and walking artists: ‘connected ambiences’,28 ‘secret corridor[s]’,29 ‘container sea-goat’,30 ‘“thin places”’,31 ‘detritus... refram[ed]’,32 ‘marginal places’,33 ‘[H]oaxes, failures, porches.... spores, tropes, fonts’,34 ‘thresholds’35 and ‘fantasylands’.36

This plethora of categories is not, however, matched by a similar wealth in models for the deployment of such categories in urban praxis, ambulatory activism or construction of ‘situations’. This absence is not new, for the IL/SI’s ‘construction of situations’ had never been developed much beyond the outline sketched by Gilles Ivain. In a psychogeographical report to the Situationist International on Les Halles in Paris, Abdelhafid Khatib first celebrated the transformation of trajectories through the area by its nocturnal ‘logjam of lorries, barricades of panniers’, but then concluded that ‘Situationist architectural complexes’ and ‘perpetually changing labyrinths’ would require ‘more adequate objects than the fruit and vegetable panniers which make up the sole barricades of today’.37 Khatib’s report encapsulates a broader contradiction between grand visions of transformation (from rebuilding churches as ruins to Constant’s ‘New Babylon’) and quotidian tactical means (*dérive*, *détournement*) which were often ‘resolved’ by obfuscation in the scrambling of general structure and material particulars in the SI’s theory of the ‘Spectacle’.

A rare example of an extended model description of the application of a category, in this case drawing on a single category of ‘urban voids’, is proposed by Francesco Careri, a founder of the Rome-based group of activist-architects ‘Stalker’. Careri identifies the emergence of a diffuse city, full of holes, voids and empty spaces that lie ‘beyond surveillance and control’,38 inviting and affordant spaces in both the margins of the city and as parts of a residual ‘system of voids in its [the city’s] interior’.39 . The inhabitants (‘new barbarians’) of this diffuse city, otherwise shuttling between home, mall and gas station (according to Careri, alienated from, and aggressive to, ‘any space designed for their social life’40) display an agentive side when they visit these void spaces ‘to grow vegetables without a permit, to walk the dog, have a picnic, make love and look for shortcuts’.41

Careri goes beyond the observational or experiential *dérive* by proposing the *dérive* itself as the means to connect up the parts of ‘an “archipelago” pattern’ of void spaces; not in order for them to be ‘*filled with things’* 42 or given ‘a false rustic nature’,43 (but to be ‘filled with meanings’44 ‘by utilizing the aesthetic form of the erratic journey’, 45 interweaving the nomadic qualities of the ‘drift’ with the nomadic qualities of the void spaces: ‘transforming it [the city] playfully from the inside out, modifying it during the journey’.46

Unquestionably reflexive, and consistent with exploratory and experiential principles, Careri’s proposals are, however, similar in form to the ‘permanent *dérive*’ at first advocated by Gilles Ivain until later he would explain ‘from the sanatorium that the dérive has its limits, and cannot be practiced continually.’47 Careri’s (and, initially, Ivain’s) nomadic formulations lack two elements that a taxonomy of ‘zombie space’ and a resistant walking in relation to the walk of the zombie possess: a disrupted spatial multiplicity and a collective form of ambulation. The multiplicitous taxonomy of ‘zombie space’ is not a material cartography, but a fanciful one; like Careri’s voids it can only be understood in the process of being explored, as a series of always temporary steppings in and out of the fictional ‘mythos’, not as a permanent psychogeographical or situationist-architectural ‘way of life’. The taxonomy of ‘zombie space’ is also a hypothesis: proposing that the fictional apocalypse upon which its different categories are predicated contains within it a revelation of the spatial relations of a real, ongoing and everyday apocalypse of gender, labour and post-colonial exploitation. In the walk of the abject zombie horde is a horrific model of collectivity and transformation (with the ever-present threat of crossing from a walk of survival into a walk of viral insurgency) which, in alienated, abject, violent and asocial form, reveals and bewails that exploitation (negating it in the process of negating everything) and which awaits our *détournement* of it and its fictional bonds.

In 2006 I advocated an experiential and observational walking in relation to the walk of the zombie; almost a decade later I am proposing the infiltration of a popular living dead ‘mythos’ into everyday urban space and ambulation in general. In 2006, a simple tactic was sufficient to equip those who might want to take up the invitation. This time, the invitation and the means are both more ambitious and less well-placed in either historic or contemporary practices.

Notes

1 Phil Smith, ‘History, Terrain and Tread: the walk of demons, zombie flesh eaters and the blind dead’, in *European Nightmares: Horror Cinema in Europe since 1945,* eds. Patricia Allmer, David Huxley and Emily Brick (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2012), 131-40.

2 Stephen Hodge, et al., *A Misguide To Anywhere.* (Exeter: Wrights & Sites, 2006), 35.

3 Hodge, et al., *A Mis-Guide To Anywhere*, 35.

4 Phil Smith, ‘A Taxonomy On Its Toes’, *Performance Research* 11:1 (2006): 33-39.

5 Phil Smith, Mythogeography, (Axminster: Triarchy Press, 2010).

6 Emma Cocker,and Close and Remote, *Manual For Marginal Places* (London: Close & Remote, 2011), 22.

7 Emma Cocker and Close and Remote, *Manual For Marginal Places*, 22.

8 Robert Harbison, *Eccentric Spaces* (Cambridge [Mass]: MIT Press, 2000), 22-37.

9 Gilles Ivain (Ivan Chtcheglov), ‘Formulary For A New Urbanism’ [1953], in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed.) Ken Knabb,(Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 6.

10 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 2009).

11 Evan Calder Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* (Ropley: Zero Books, 2011), 5 & 8.

12 Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, 83-84.

13 Simon Clark, ‘The Undead Martyr: Sex, Death, and Revolution in George Romero’s Zombie Films’ in *The Undead and Philosophy: Chicken Soup for the Soulless* , eds. Richard Greene & K. Silem Mohammad (Chicago and La Salle [IL]: Open Court, 2006), 201.

14 Clark, ‘The Undead Martyr: Sex, Death, and Revolution in George Romero’s Zombie Films’, 197.

15 Clark, ‘Undead Martyr: Sex, Death, and Revolution in George Romero’s Zombie Films’, 199.

16 ‘Review: Zombie 108’ last modified 23 July 2012, Viewed 10 March 2013, <<http://downwithfilm.com/2012/07/23/review-zombie-108/>>.

17 Clark, ‘Undead Martyr: Sex, Death, and Revolution in George Romero’s Zombie Films’, 201-04.

18 ‘PiFan 2012 review: The Calamitous ZOMBIE’ last modified 14 August 2012, Viewed 10 March 2013, <<http://twitchfilm.com/2012/08/pifan-2012-review-the-calamitous-zombie-108.html> >.

19 Jean Baudrillard, ’The Precession of Simulacra’ in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* , ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum, 1984), 267.

20 Guy Debord, ‘Theory of the Dérive’ [1958] in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981),.62.

21 Ivain, ‘Formulary For A New Urbanism’, 6.

22 Debord, ‘Theory of the Dérive’, 62.

23 Nick Papadimitriou, *Scarp* (London: Sceptre, 2012), 253.

24 Shawn Micallef, *Stroll: Psychogeographic Walking Tours of Toronto* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2010), 8.

25 Damian Brennan, ‘Discursive/Excursive’ in *Guidebook; Three Manoeuvres*, ed. Tim Brennan (London: Camerawords 1999), 67.

26 John R. Stilgoe, *Magic Lies Outside: regaining history and awareness in everyday places* (New York: Walker and Company, 1998), 184-45.

27 Lisa Robertson, *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (Astoria, Oregon: Clear Cut Press, 2003), 17.

28 David Haden, *Walking With Cthulhu: H.P.Lovecraft as psychogegrapher, New York City 1924-26* (self-published, 2011), 47.

29 Stilgoe, *Magic Lies Outside: regaining history and awareness in everyday places* , 82.

30 Nigel Ayers, *The Bodmin Moor Zodiac : twelve excursions into the sacred landscape of Cornwall* (Lostwithiel: Earthly Delights, 2007), 49.

31 Papadimitriou, *Scarp*, 43.

32 Tina Richardson, ‘The Cootie Catcher Dérive or A Walk With Some Really interesting Dutch Chaps’ in *Psychogeographical Field Reports* ed. Wilfried Hou je Bek (self-published, undated), 5.

33 Cocker and Close and Remote, *Manual For Marginal Places*, 26-30.

34 Robertson, *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture*, 15.

35 Polly Macpherson and Simon Persighetti, *Reading THE BACKS (*Self-published, Exeter, 2010), 5.

36 Micallef, *Stroll: Psychogeographic Walking Tours of Toronto*, 286.

37 Abdelhafid Khatib,’ Attempt at a psychogeographical description of Les Halles’ in *Theory of the Dérive and other situationist writings on the city* eds. Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa, (Barcelona: ACTAR, 1996), 73 & 76.

38 Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes*, (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002), 184.

39 Careri, *Walkscapes*, 183.

40 Careri, *Walkscapes*, 180.

41 Careri, *Walkscapes*, 181.

42 Careri, *Walkscapes*, 183 (original emphasis).

43 Careri, *Walkscapes*, 184.

44 Careri, *Walkscapes*, 183.

45 Careri, *Walkscapes*, 184.

46 Careri, *Walkscapes* , 189.

47 McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath The Street: the everyday life and glorious times of the Situationist International* (London: Verso, 2011), 61.

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