THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY AND SOCIAL IMAGINATION

Master's Thesis
Presented to
Cultural Production Program
Brandeis University

Mark Auslander, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
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Acknowledgements

A great deal of appreciation goes to my thesis committee, Dr. Mark Auslander, and Dr. Andreas Teuber, for their patience and knowledge; Dr. Ellen Schattschneider for the great conversations that found their way into this work; To my friends and family; and to the zombies for giving of their imagination(s) and performances.
May 2009

ABSTRACT

Social Imaginary & Social Imagination

A thesis presented to the Cultural Production Program

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What is the imagination, and how does one examine it ethnographically? Philosophers like Derrida, Sartre, Barthes, and Taylor have often questioned its existence in relation to consciousness, investigating the nature of consciousness through the imagination. As an ethnographic inquiry, this research goes beyond defining the imagination and investigates how it operates in the mundane performances in life. Through questioning the relationship between the imaginary and imagination on a social level, it becomes apparent that the imaginary and imagination are not nominal forms of the same entity, rather, aspects of the process of imagining. The social imaginary provides the basis for, and is transformed into new ideals, through the social arena into the social imagination.
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In Sufi philosophy, the imagination is sometimes located between the spiritual and material - the sensuous - world; at other times between being and nothingness, as somehow equivalent to existence. The imagination is an intermediate “reality,” to quote Chittic (1989, 117), “…it (material object) is neither this nor that or both this and that.” The imagination is what I imagine myself to be seeing, and the thing is located somewhere between what I think it is and what it is. The social imaginary mediates between the imagination and the thing itself. It would thus seem that the social imagination, the imagination that is linked to collective make-believe, is the communal sense of intermediate realities, experienced through the body of the individual. If imagination is equal to mental experience and the "real" is what is going on in the world, but is constituted by that which I see it as and by what is mediated to me by the social imaginary, and the social imaginary is located out "there" and in there. It is what mediates, even over-determines, individual transliterations of communal symbols.

What is to be said of the imagination when it is had by a group of zombies? A question to philosophy might be "can zombies imagine?" When the case at hand is a collective group of people dressing like zombies, as is the case with the Toronto Zombie Walk that will be examined throughout this paper, we are free to express that zombies can actively imagine, and do, as a group.
The Toronto Zombie Walk is an event that takes place every year in October. Its size has increased exponentially since its inaugural year, which is also considered the first occurrence of a zombie walk, from 15-30 people to over 3000 in 2008. For this many people to want to dress like zombies and take to the streets of Toronto, there must be a draw. As will be explored through this paper, part of the attractiveness to be in, or be of (via being a voyeur), is the fulfillment of various desires in the social imagination.

While most intellectuals have steered clear of examining the social imagination, save for those in the Jungian tradition of psychoanalytics, a good deal of critical theory and political philosophy has been written on the concept of the social imaginary. The political philosopher Charles Taylor (2002) offers the most minimalist definition from which we can build. The social imaginary is “…not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society,” (91). By adopting the imagination of social interaction from the past, that is the social imaginary, bricoleurs use not just nostalgic symbols of the past, but also the rules that govern(ed) them- rules that are often bent or broken. As Crapanzano (1980) so skillfully points out in his examinations of imagining far off places, “transgression is, itself, a permissible social construction,” in that it always highlights the system from which it is a part.

Crapanzano, like Geertz, believes in events as microcosms of social reality, that is, small events are meta-theatres that express the larger social conditions in which the events take place. Thus, for Crapanzano, the Toronto Zombie Walk could
be analyzed from the outside as a meta-theatre of what people in society in general (who don't think they're zombies [metaphorically]) won't admit to. Simply, the zombie walk is a display of the lack of agency and freedom that comes with identifying as a "society" in the western world. Taylor, essentially through the social imaginary, discusses how one should live, particularly learning how "I" should live. In order to answer this question though, the "I" must be defined, as well as what living is, which, for Taylor, is all based on the acceptance of what the other "I"s are doing. This is the social imaginary for him.

What this approach ignores, however, is the fact that the zombie walk is an attack on that very concept of the "I". By its anonymous corporeality, and its trance like affect on participants, the "I" disappears, much as it does in the collective effervescence that underwrites most of daily life. As a way of counteracting this missing piece, this work aims to examine the social imaginary as a mediator between reality and social imagination- as part of a process of social imagining.

While some authors may use imaginary and imagination interchangeably, there exists a difference in terms of temporality and function. That is not to say that they are unconnected, rather they exist in a relationship of process, much like knowing and knowledge. The social imaginary acts as a projection from the past, an ideal of sort held by authoritative figures that becomes adopted as fact by descending generations; whereas the social imagination is the process of creating realms of poly-sensory experience by groups of like-minded individuals. Exchanges between social imaginary and social imagination are constantly occurring.
Beyond these exchanges, I am particularly interested in the process between turning social imaginary into social imagination- the taking of old, and while keeping it fully intact, making it new. In this way ‘what has been’ becomes as viable an interpretation of actions and symbols as ‘what will be said’. The grey space between social imaginary and social imagination is one that produces multiple webs of narratives that are read simultaneously between two communities, makers and voyeurs, who are predisposed to create different social imaginations from their perspectives towards the imaginary being used.

In this paper, I will examine the ways in which the social imaginary, a past imagining that surrounded a set of symbols or actions and now is naturalized as being part of said symbols, is transformed through the social imagination, the not-real that stands in the real, which is all taking place in the real, as a way of bricolage. This occurs by way of the social imaginary existing outside of the imaginer, influencing the social imagination that is put out into the world. I will first examine the literature written on the social imaginary, as well as that which alludes to an aspect of the social imaginary. Following, I will discuss various parts of the social imagination. I will then show the ethnographic use of the distinction between imaginary and imagination by analyzing my experiences of being a zombie in the Toronto Zombie Walk. Finally, I will take a critical look at the ethnographic text, and offer insights and critique to studying the imaginary/imagination complex through this means.
REVIEWING THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

What brings us together as a community? And, more importantly, what is it that makes us a community? White and Dillingham (1973), Mithen (1996), Cassirer (1962), and many others suggest that it is our use and exchange of symbols, and the meaning that we have attributed to them, that over-determines our sense of group. In this section I will attempt to define elements of the social imaginary by abstracting from various thinkers, then I will look at seminal uses of the “social imaginary”, and finally attempt to carve my own definition from the definitions of these, and secondary, authors. In this section's conclusion, I hope to have shown the social imaginary as a pre-existing notion of over-determination that is consumed by the imaginer- it is the zombie that defines zombie-ness in the zombie walk.

To abstract a definition of the social imaginary, we can borrow from the work of Schutz (1967). Using his work on the way people come to know meaning in the social world, we can suggest that the social imaginary is activated when

The individual takes these perspectival foreshortenings into account in his acts of meaning-establishment and meaning interpretation... In these acts of establishing or interpreting meanings there is built up for us in varying degrees of anonymity, in greater or lesser intimacy of experience, in manifold intersecting perspectives, the structural meaning of the social world, which is as much our world (strictly speaking, my world) as much as it is the world of the others. (8-9)
In using this, we suggest that the social imaginary is a prefabricated notion that we internalize in order to predict the actions and behaviors of others. It is activated in both the "real" and the "imaginary", and serves to over-determine the symbolic processes in which we act. By over-determine, I do not mean to suggest an agentive-free system, rather one in which interpretation is free to move about while holding a symbolic consistency.

Further, we must address why the social imaginary is social. Again, we can turn to Schutz, who suggests:

"Once the existence of a Thou is assumed, we have already entered the realm of intersubjectivity. The world is now experienced by the individual as shared by his fellow creatures, in short, as a social world." (139)

If by social imaginary, we refer to the presupposition of others, then the level at which it is social, the assuming of the Thou, is obvious. As Schutz points out in other parts of this work, we do not truly ever know the meanings of the actions of others. This resides permanently in the social imaginary, as we are only ever assuming parallel streams of consciousness. There is no objective motivation to meaning making, rather it is all filtered to our preconceived notions of rational action and rational meaning, which also includes the occasional irrational.

Another abstracted use of the social imaginary can be found in Durkheim’s concept of the elementary form from *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1968). In studying Australian Aboriginal religion, Durkheim hoped to show that religion was not divinely or supernaturally inspired, rather a social production. He attempted to do
so through identifying patterns of emphasis in religion, and the effect those beliefs had on the lives of people in the society. Essentially, the social imaginary can be conceived of as a subjectively positioned elementary form, from which meaning is charged and initiated.

Further, Durkheim was mostly concerned with social solidarity throughout the breadth of his intellectual career. The assumption of the religious imperatives of others is thus part of the social imaginary, as religion acts to pull people together both mentally and physically. By doing so, religion is able to reaffirm collective morals and beliefs in the minds of all members of society. The belief that others abide by these norms is from the social imaginary, the over-determination of social character, of others. In this light, Durkheim can be read differently when he suggests that, "Since it is in spiritual ways that social pressure exercises itself, it could not fail to give men the idea that outside themselves exist one or several powers, both moral and, at the same time, efficacious, upon which they depend," (171). We must ask, in the context of this paper, if he speaks of religion or the social imaginary as a whole.

One famous derivative from the social imaginary in this same vein is the *Imagined Community* (Anderson 1991). A nation, to Anderson, is “an imagined political community imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,” (6). The social imaginary is utilized here because people, the builders of the social construct, do not know each other through the quotidian, but through “print capitalism,” by which a common discourse becomes available.
Silverstein (2000), who utilizes Whorf to refute Anderson, suggests that discourse is only meaningful in the sense of building communities if there is an already existing rule of discourse through which they behave. A particular language’s nature influences the habitual thought of any speaker (or reader), which precedes the notion of print capitalism. Quite simply, in order for print to serve as a way for imagined communities to form, there must be an idea that an imagined community is acceptable.

While Anderson’s notion of the “how” in social imaginary has been challenged, his view of the social imaginary becomes one element on which the social imaginary itself is built. It is built upon creativity, the creativity of a social construct none the less, and community. As I will suggest at the end of this section, though, this creativity comes not from the present, but from the past. In order to want an imagined community like a nation, someone must have previously thought it a morally sound idea. In terms of a zombie walk, in order to want to be a zombie, one must know the text of what a zombie is, and what it has the potential to mean.

Reconsidering Anderson’s vehicle of the imaginary, language is problematic in understanding the imagination, as it fails to grasp the sensuous nature of a world in three dimensions. Whereas discourse is often seen as a communicative code, the human use of objects, like language, is not always meant to signify. Language can also act as an immediate means of satisfaction, just as meaningful in transmitting message as it is in fulfilling internal desire. The sensuous side of imagining the social cannot be embraced through a paradigm that denies sensuous presence. In
terms of Anderson, what it feels to be a member of the larger sense is not found in the communal discourse, but in the activation of the imaginary - the sense of belonging initiated by discourse, not through it. The imaginary, in the *Imagined Communities*, is not the property, the adjective, of the community, rather the need that is fulfilled by the individual. Sensuous meanings are pre-linguistic, but that is not to say that they are resistant to language as a social construct of power.

A more recent article, addressing directly a thing called the *social imaginary*, is work on moral definitions of society by Taylor (2002). In this article, the social imaginary is the unconscious assumptions that a society makes concerning existence - things that are beyond logical mapping, but we conceive of as true beyond a shadow of a doubt. It “is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society. (91) […] This term is something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain…rather the ways in which they imagine their social existence,” (109). Although titling the piece *On Social Imaginary*, Taylor is less concerned with the thing itself than with its utilization from pre-modernity to modernity.

The issue that quickly arises in Taylor’s work is the appearance, although gradual, of a dichotomy between the social imaginary and social theory. While the social imaginary is just taken to be true, as motivations of the unconscious, which may mean they are forever acted unknown, social theory is a known, even created, by people. Although he acknowledges that theories may “infiltrate” the social imaginary, by means of being absorbed from past generations, he does not discuss
how this infiltration works, nor does he examine the tensions and disjunctions that occur, nor the ways they are reconciled, ignored, or played upon. While social theory is a corporeal construct, and is thus controlled, Taylor suggests that the social imaginary seems to flow from an incorporeal source- the imagination of those from the past- and untouched by observers.

If we are to imagine something, be it through unconscious or conscious motivations, it must have come from somewhere. A social imaginary of the past must have given the impetus for that which is created now. The problem in Taylor’s definition is finding a creator- the social imaginary does not become until the creator has moved to the horizons of the past, and, in most cases, died.

In the shortfalls of Taylor’s social imaginary, we find the remaining element of what one would need to suggest a social imaginary, that is the repertoire of which one could base their imaginings. In order for this imaginary to be social, however, this repertoire must be available to the world. That is to say, this repertoire is conventional. It can come to posses, or re-appropriate, a semiotic economy distant from its manifest.

Finally, the work of Castoriadis affords a base on which to build the social imaginary.

I call imaginary those significations because they do not correspond to “rational” or “real” elements and they are not sufficiently dealt with in reference to them, but they come into being by creation, and I call them social
since they only exist as instituted and as an object of participation of an
impersonal and anonymous collective entity. (1986: 68)

It is on this definition where we can begin defining the social imaginary in such a way
that liberates it from the undesirable shackles of text or image, and in a way that
becomes of diverse use for the study of cultural creativity.

Social imaginary: two specific dimensions exist - the realm of affect (the social),
and the imaginary (experiences created internally). It is a lived history that affects
our every feeling of being. It is a system that is beyond the logic of how we should
live, and naturalized by the passing of time from a far off imaginative horizon. Most
importantly, it begins as the social imagination - a vision of how one should operate-
and then transforms into how one must live, should we use Taylor’s definition. To
expand this definition though, to pertain not just to moral codes, but to include the
codes that surround the signs and symbols of everyday life, is to offer insight into the
ways we live. Why is a video camera better at shooting video than being a hammer?
Because its use is over-determined by its past uses and by our own desires. The
former is the social imaginary, while the latter is our social imagination of what could
be fulfilled by the use of the camera.

**EXPLORING THE SOCIAL IMAGINATION**

The social imagination is a complex organism. It is social in its insertion into the
social world, again highlighting Schutz’s (1967) notion of the assumed Thou. What is
of deep concern is the way in which it is imagined. As Sartre would have it, it is
because it is the not-real that constitutes the real. For others, like Clifford Geertz, it is
the meta-real that influences and is simultaneously influenced by the real. In this section, I would like to offer insights by Sartre, Barthes, and a few others on the nature of the imagination and its characteristic. I will primarily be highlighting the way in which the imagination is built, its function as a mechanism of desire, and the relationship between the social imagination and the individual imagination.

The title *Psychology of the Imagination* (1972) is misleading. Sartre, in this piece, is less concerned with the imagination than the state of consciousness that could be deemed the imagination. As he states in the introduction, “This book aims to describe the great function of consciousness to create a world of unrealities, or imagination…” (un-numbered). In this one quote, however, one aspect of Sartre’s imagination that must be considered is the unreality of the imagined.

Derrida is famously quoted as saying, “…to pretend, I actually do the thing: I have therefore only pretended to pretend.” (attributed by Descombes (1981:139) . In this light, to pretend to do something, to enter into a realm of conscious unreality for the purpose of acting, we are truly doing the thing. Pretense can only take us so far, by acting like the zombies that we may be (as a metaphor of our roles in society), are we not actually being zombies? In theatre, do we not become the person we are not by pretending to be them, thus becoming them? Sartre, as will be seen, offers an interesting building block of the imagination, but the dichotomous nature of his real/unreal is too rigid for use in ethnographic studies of the imagination. As will be further discussed, if the imagination is characterized as a mode of fulfilling desire,
then one should take into account that it has the ability to really fulfill the desire. To pretend is to actually do the thing one wished to feel.

Sartre does offer valuable insight into the way the imagination, be it social or individual, operates. At the conclusion of *Psychology of the Imagination* he toils over the question of whether or not a consciousness that does not imagine can exist. In working through the separation of the imagination and consciousness, he comes to this idea:

Thus, to posit the world as a world [imagined] or to negate it is one and the same thing. In this sense, Heidegger can say that nothingness is the constitutive structure of the existent. To be able to imagine, it is enough that consciousness be able to surpass the real in constituting it as a world, since negating of the real is always implied by its constitutions in the world. (267-268)

To summarize in light of our previous critique, the imagination is simultaneously constituted by reality and negates its place, time, image, and action. It is thus the real that allows for the imaginary to be such, however it is not “unreal”. Perhaps it is anti-reality- to re-use a metaphor, one side of a piece of paper- reality constituting the other. Simply, using Sartre, we can say that the imagination exists in the not-real while standing in the real, which is all taking place in the real.

As such, the real is obviously used in the imagined world. Sartre offers a brief gem that leads into the use of the real world in imagination: “This reality [the imagination] does not make the object of any special act of my attention, but it is co-
present as an essential condition of the existence of the reality actually perceived,” (262). We can read Sartre as suggesting that objects in the “real” world can, and are, utilized in the imaginary world. Whether or not it is for its “intended” use, or that suggested by the hegemonic systems of knowledge defining “right”s and “wrong”s, is beyond determination. I would seem to think that what is used in the imagination is not what it is in the real world- a stick as a sword, make-up as blood, the ground as the sky to fly an imagined airplane- although it could be used as such.

The social imagination operates in such a way that is always based on its current context. Thus, all imaginings are not created equal; rather, each is contextually based with its own semiotic economy. Further, the social imagination does not merely spring into existence, but is contextually constituted of the real that surrounds the person imagining. In turn, the social imagination also helps constitute the social real for each individual partaking.

In discussing the imagining of a sign, Barthes (1972), while not directly talking about the imagination in the same sense, contemplates how signs are utilized in imagining. Three systems of imagining occur for Barthes: symbolic imagination, systematic (or paradigmatic) Imagination, and syntagmatic imagination. It is important to note that Barthes is discussing the imagination of the semiotic analyst, but, in being the surveyors of our own imaginary landscape, we too are analysts of the cognitive landscape. The first, symbolic imagination focuses on signs in isolation and is of little use to us in imagining. The paradigmatic imagination considers the virtual repertoire of similar, yet distinct, signs- its use lies in substituting one thing for
another. This is perhaps one of the major functions of the imagination. In using a stick, which itself resembles a sword by its rigid, phallic nature, we are able to begin constructing the tools in the imagined world. The paradigmatic imagination is that which we use to create objects used in the imagination. The syntagmatic imagination, which Barthes describes as “…no longer sees the sign in perspective, it foresees it in its extension,” (217) is what is used to construct the world around the objects that we transformed around the paradigmatic imagination.

To further understand the imagination, and move Barthes closer to his original intentions, we turn to Myth Today (1982), in which Barthes addresses the difference between metalanguage and connotation. Of use, which Barthes says is the only one of use, is connotation. Most easily described as the use of a sign in sign construction, signified and signifier collectively serves as a signifier of a more complex sign. Like myth’s role in society, imagining is used to naturalize the use of objects in play. By using a sword, that is a sword (reality stick), and placing it above “this is imagining”, we serve to efficiently create the sword itself as a tool to be used in the current perceived environment, which is the make-believe one.

Figure 1: Barthes Notion of Connotation and Myth Applied to Sword Play

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Signifier</td>
<td>Stick (Sword)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signified</td>
<td>Sword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>denoted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am Imagining a Sword Fight</td>
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In the case of the zombie walk, we must take account for the mystic, religious, elements of life after death. The problem that arises is that we can place a zombie sign in the denotated space, but society has alleviated (from its conscious) any system that will allow the signified of "channeling the dead" to exist. Are we to read, then, the zombies as having nothing to do with the dead? Or, can we read it as being a replace, even re-developing, of a signified, of a context in which we can access the dead?

Why, as Sartre asked, do we imagine swords and dragons, while building castles in the air, and what is the connection with consciousness? Like a dream, the imagination seems to be a mode of phantasy. And, as Freud (2005) so rigorously points out, every phantasy is a mode of desire fulfillment. Freud lightly touches on dreaming in the waking state as he discusses the daydream and the poet (1963).

When the human being grows up and ceases to play, he only gives up the connection with real objects; instead of playing he begins to create phantasy. He builds castles in the air and creates what are called daydreams. I believe that the greater number of human beings create phantasies as long as they live. (36)

He continues later in the essay to state that, as in dreams,

"Unsatisfied wishes are the driving power behind phantasies; every separate phantasy contains the fulfillment of a wish, and improves on unsatisfactory reality. The impelling wishes vary according to the sex, character, and circumstance of the creator," (37).
I, however, would argue against Freud’s notion that adults no longer play. As will be seen in the ethnographic part of this project, adults are actively playing on a daily basis for their own purposes. Further, for those with children, one could easily argue that adults entering into the world of play with their little ones are actively imagining, although not as ardently.

Freud’s linking of these three realms, day-dreams, phantasy, and make-believe, allows for the clear assertion that regardless of which a participant is directly doing, it is driven by desire- a multi-faceted desire that is filled with latent and manifest modes. Lacan (1978) states that in every blatant lie there is a steadfast truth. To transpose this into the imagination versus the non-imagination is to say that I pretend to fly an airplane, I am flying an airplane, to pretend the doll is alive is to acknowledge the belief in the secret life of objects, to pretend to attack a person with a sword is to make an assault on them, and to pretend to be a zombie is to access the libido that comes with playing with the dead, as you are embodying death. Along with these manifest truths lie the latent ones of the control of power in creation, destruction, and sustenance.

While all of what has taken place directly concerns the imagination, it is essential that we bring it into the realm of the social imagination- that act of communal imagining of a world, be it the battlefield of nine year old knights or adult zombies. In order for play in a community to take place, a group’s imaginations must resonate together for the purpose of coming to meet a goal- be it the pseudo-construction of reality or its collective escape.
The social imagination serves as a way for collectives to recreate a world for themselves in the world that already contains them. In this world, which resides in the world of everyone else, groups manipulate symbols in order to build their interactions and internalize interactions with outside communities as constructive to their cause. Finally, through these processes, the group comes to fulfill a spectrum of latent and manifest desires.

In what ways, we must ask, is the social imagination different from the individual imagination? I would argue, as I believe would Winnicott (2005), that these are not two diffuse imaginations, rather two sides of a piece of paper. In discussing the way other constitutes self’s self-consciousness, Heidegger (1977) suggests that other becomes object, resource for self’s own project, like that of imagining. The imagining, and therefore thinking, self, by virtue of imagining the other, is thinking and constitutes its own existence. Are we to believe that Other is not imagining as well? Perhaps in projecting other, we are also absorbing others’ imaginary.

Before the social imagination and personal imagination can be discussed in relation to one another, it is important to decide the appearance of each. Which came first- the chicken or the egg?

If one were to suggest the individual imagination as a precursor, it would leave one to wonder whether or not the social imagination was truly that of the social, or that of the projection onto others. From such a view one could propose a process of *Projective Identification* (Ogden 1979) whereby a person disavows various desires, projecting them onto another person, in order that they may separate the desires
from themselves, but not wholly. Essentially, in this perspective, the social imagination is the projection of one person’s desires onto the actions of other groups such that they can learn to master that desire without the “noxious” experience (359). As Ogden points out, the phantasy is one of inhabiting a person via an object of the self— the imaginary— and controlling him from within.

This leads to a number of problems, both pragmatic and logical. The idea of projecting the social imagination into another person from the personal imagination fails to account for the charisma that is the result of social imagining. In order for solidarity to form, the group would be projecting a desire into one another. Perhaps, should one choose this decision, the social imaginary could be the combination, the noise, of multiple projections being diffused amongst a group. However, what is to be said about meaning in the social imagination? Are all of these others doing merely what I say because I inhabit them, or do they create their own meaning, and how? I would suggest that they, themselves, must possess their own personal imaginary that conflicts with the projection. Thus, a prioritized personal imaginary may be too simple for such a complex situation.

Considering the social imagination to be the first, the dominant, would suggest that the personal imagination does not exist unless learned from the social imaginary. One could look to Winnicott (1992) in this light, specifically his work on the recognition of consciousness in infants. He suggests that what the baby knows of the self early in its life is only what the mother knows of it. The infant cannot know his feelings for the mother; instead, he induces those feelings from her. They are not
signifier nor signified; rather the infant’s feelings are signification, the creative transmission between mother and baby.

In this suggestion a few problems arise. If the individual imagination is informed by the social imagination, which must be the result of multiple personal imaginings, then where did the first imagination, or the social imaginary, come from? In his book on the prehistory of the modern mind, Mithen (1998) might be read to suggest that the imagination arises out of the middle/upper Paleolithic transition, out of the merging of technical intelligence (tools), social intelligence (communication & proto-socialization), and the knowledge of natural history (hunting & gathering).

Figure 2: Mithen’s Model of Cognitive Fluidity (1998: 145, 154, 179)

Simply put, through the attribution of character in the prediction of an animal’s behavior, and the similar attributing of that character to a human’s actions, the connection between animal and man, social intelligence and natural history intelligence, creates religion. This collapse of intelligence-segmentation emerges
from the proficiency of hunting, and results in the rise of what Humphrey (2002) defines as reflexive social consciousness, which enables the prediction of “other’s” behavior. The problem with both Mithen’s suggestion and the perspective of the social imagination first, again lies in agency. Should the individual imagination be merely mimesis, or ethnomimesis, then from where would the creativity of negotiating symbols arise? The imagination is not predetermined in its functioning as this model would suggest.

From the Maori frame of reference, according to Salmond (1985), the very elements of the knowing self—memory, knowledge, and desire—emerged in genealogical stages before the rest of reality was formed. While seeming to point towards the existence of the individual imagination as being dominant, Sahlins (1987) insights on Maori kinship reveals that the Maori concept of “I” is relational— the self relates to various kin based on the context in which the selves are emoting themselves. In regards to our question of the relationship of the imaginations, the Maori vantage point would suggest that both arise in harmony simultaneously. The social imagination cannot exist without the individual imaginary, and vice versa. For Mithen, this would entail the combination of the various facilities of intelligence in such a way that accentuates the talent of one hunter over another— changing his aptitude for what he/she imagines, as well as his/her preference for various symbols. In terms of the modern man, while we may come to know ourselves through the absorption of emotions from the mother-figure, these interchanges also inspire within
us a simultaneous notion of self through the fulfillment of desire, whose success inspires further actions.

**INTERFACING SOCIAL IMAGINARY AND SOCIAL IMAGINATION**

On the pillars of the social imaginary and the social imagination rests the ability to create culture and society alike. It is the ability that makes bricoleurs bricolent for the purpose of bricolage: users create beyond-infinite transformations of and with semiotic economies in order to adapt “culture” to personal and shared interests (Levi-Strauss 1968). In what follows, the social imaginary will be examined in light of the social imagination, to show how the imaginary is transformed by the imagination, much like knowledge is transformed by knowing (Fardon 1995).

The social imagination operates in such a way that is always based on its current context. In light of such, all imaginings are not equal; rather, each is contextually based with its own ethnological system. Further, they do not merely spring into existence, but are the result of the real it imagines around. That being said, a degree of autonomy exists in the fact that each imagined realm has the ability to spring forth new imaginings, in such a way that the real becomes the sum total of real and all imaginings that previously took place.

The way that children play together, the over-determined nature that allows them to interact in the same imaginary environment, is directly taken from the conscious, concrete environment in which they act. Should we consider play, imagination, as a state similar to dreaming (which I will explore more closely soon), “We may justly say that no matter what the dream offers, it find its material in reality and in the psychic
life arrayed around this reality…it must be taken from what we had already experience either objectively or subjectively.” (Hildebrandt, from Freud 2005: 474). In discussing the use of play and its relation to reality, Winnicott mimics these sentiments; “the precariousness of play belongs to the fact that it is always on the theoretical line between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived,” (1992, 50).

First and foremost, the social imaginary operates in over-determining various elements of social interaction. In this way, it resembles Weber’s (1968) concept of charisma- a quality that sets apart groups from others, and is endowed with “supernatural” eminence. It is a quality that rises from a strong predisposition to the denial of the validity of what is thought to be “sacred” to society. Charisma is that which attracts groups to the cause.

To revisit Durkheim’s (1965) book on religion, Charisma is the energy that comes from the excitement of collective effervescence. Whereas everyday life, everyday walking in the city as will be seen in the ethnography to follow, is consider profane, when a community perceives of itself as gathering as a whole for a cause, the event is transformed into the sacred, and the high energy level associated with this gathering is transferred into objects. Collective effervescence is the perceived energy, possibly anxiety, which comes with the loss of individuality and the strengthening of the collective. In discussing this in religious terms, Durkheim states that:
Thus, if the totem is the symbol of both the god and the society, is this not because the god and the society are one and the same? How could the emblem of the group have taken the form of that quasi-divinity if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities? Thus the god of the clan, the totemic principle, can be none other than the clan itself, but the clan transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal that serves as totem. (208)

The social imaginary can be seen, not as synonymous to, but in conjunction with charisma. It is, in fact, that which makes the charisma beyond the quotidian. The social imaginary serves to recreate itself through constant transformation, the social imagination by definition. While charisma most typically results from what Durkheim (1984) would call _anomie_, and is thus more fervent in times of identity crisis, the social imagination serves to summon such a crisis in an attempt to summon a brief streak of charisma, one that will inspire groups to go beyond the quotidian.

Further, drawing the connection from Weber, the social imaginary, like charisma, resembles the Kantian sublime. For Kant (1965), the sublime is an aura of awe; it is the _shock_ in shock and awe. Again, one could claim that the social imaginary is what creates the sublime. But the sublime, while undoubtedly powerful, is vulnerable as it resides not in the thing itself, but in the mind of the viewing subject, and thus is constantly subject to change. In this sense, the sublime is the social imaginary of a specific object in stasis. As suggested earlier, all imaginings are not created equal, and are based on the context in which they occur. It is thus possible that the sublime
is the residue left on an object after the social imaginary moves on to a new object-person relationship. Further, to ask of the philosophers, is whether or not the sublime is social?

Berlin (2002) may also offer interesting insight into the ways in which the social imaginary interfaces with the social imagination, and in some ways more adequately than Weber. Of most interest is Berlin’s emphasis on the human capacity to critically engage and justify value choices, which lessens the conflict between values and allows for compromise. Whereas Weber would argue that the most charismatic defines the group, Berlin could be read to offer the view that in activating the social imagination, where different people have different interpretations of the social imaginary, the community has the ability to synthesize these imaginaries in a way that makes the imagination more conducive to specific individual, and group, goals. This, in fact, is one of the major operations of the social imaginary/imagination interface- the creative synthesis and re-appropriation of multiple imaginary meta-narratives that surround objects of interpretation in a group. This synthesis occurs in such a way, as stated before, that allows for over-determination in individual interpretation. It is through this process that what is originally just a charismatic movement is taken up and associated with social symbols, which are often transformed by this association.

In considering the immediate temporal context of the social imagination, what is the source of this over-determination? Who, or what, is the over-determiner? Simply, it is the social imaginary- the past ideal of what symbols are appropriate for various
occasions- combined with the social imagination- the contextually based creativity involved in the coding of a non-manifest message- in such a way that a pyramid of over-determination occurs. First and foremost, the objects of the social imagination are over-determined by the semiotic economy in which the imagining occurs- a conglomeration of the cultural environmental repertoire of symbols- and all of the norms that surround that economy. Secondly, an over-determination occurs by the holders, or the recipients (if we consider charisma to be projected as opposed to attained), of power over the group- the charismatic who must negotiate with their social imaginary. These agents organize what the social imagining may be about, be it a themed parade, an edited volume of creative writing, or a photographer posting a themed exhibit. The social-imaginary is the embodiment of possible experiences that are based on the negotiation of these over-determining factors.

It may be useful to think of the relationship in terms of Lottman’s (1967) primary and secondary communication-modeling systems that are restricted to communities present- as opposed to a universal modeling system. A primary modeling system contains a general picture of the world that is shared- it is a universal (within the universe of discourse) means of communication. The social imaginary, the way one “should” act, is thus the primary modeling system. A secondary modeling system is one based on the primary while acquiring new superstructures- it is simultaneously communication of the primary system and world pictures in themselves. This, in turn, describes the social imagination, which builds itself through the social imaginary and simultaneously re-informs it. We only know the social imagination through the use of
the social imaginary, although the imagination is equally efficient in communication and its own autonomous system. In questioning what brings forth new and different forms of society, Lottman suggests that significations are not significations of something, nor do they add to or refer to something. The social imagination, for him, is thus the power to bring forth new social contexts from the social imaginary.

Social context provides actors both a reservoir of cultural and social predispositions and raw materials from which to negotiate a relationship with a distinct performance, be it an imaginary sword fight between two friends in the toy section of a department store or people performing as zombies through bustling city streets. Gadamer (1960) focuses on this ideal, by describing the ways in which a work of art serves an internal experiential function, and yet not purely a private affair. The experience, for him, is not merely subjective, but informed by the shared traditions, a vortex of social and cultural norms, that gives both the artwork and the experience of it shape. By recognizing the norms that shape cultural expression as conventional, the experience of art ceases to be a personal experience and becomes one that is also influenced by a social arena. The individuality of a person who stands in the presence of art, be it through artistic creation OR consumption, cannot be denied, but it should not be dislodged from the social context of a set of aesthetic norms.

The subjectivity is embedded within the paint strokes, which indicate assimilation to the forms in which certain 'affects' are to be given expression, and guides the internal subjectivity of the viewer to their own intuition. Simply, a painting cannot be
talked of as merely an object in the mind of a spectator, but also a subject that is capable of expressing cultural codes through the interpreter. The work is changed as it moves from being an expression of the artist to an experience of a viewer, and the viewer becomes changed by the work of art. A painting or performance (if there is any difference) shares in the being of that which it represents, and the representation of that which it represents (the painting) belongs to the original experience itself; its power (ideologically, emotionally, etc.) determined in part by the power of the experience that it represents.

Gadamer, to highlight his views of (inter)subjectivity and shared means of expression, utilizes the concept of play, in an anthropological sense. Through the world of play, the world of social imagining one might say, individual subjectivities partially ebb into the sea of collective effervescence when people are engaged in playing a game whose rules determine their behavior. As suggested by Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, the desires and inclinations of the individual become altered by, and partially replaced by, the community's. For Gadamer, the subject of a specific work of art is not the subjectivity of a person, but the subjectivity of the work itself, the work serving as a passageway to a community of assumed other viewers.

To re-develop the idea for the purposes of speaking of the social imaginary/social imagination interface, the viewer assumes a community (consisting of other viewers or the artist), which is prescribed with cultural values (the social imaginary), in viewing the work, and it is the social imaginary that he his part of at
the time of viewing that affects his imagining inside the world of the painting, and his interpretations of the painting. Thus, if the painting, or any other performance that is reliant on the world of play, has an audience of more than one, each with their own reactions (and assuming the reactions are pronounced through a performance on the stage of life), the imagination becomes social, at part fulfilling the desires of the individual and embracing the desires of the collective.

Returning to the operations of the social imaginary, Castoriadis again provides good insight. In questioning what brings forth new and different forms of society, he suggests that “the central significations are not significations of something, neither are they significations added to or referred to something,” (1975: 320). The social imagination, for him also, is thus the power to bring forth new social contexts from the social imaginary.

What Castoriadis does not account for, however, is that the social imaginary must be based in part, but not entirely, on the previous social contexts in which it exists. One cannot imagine transgression without previous cultural truths. It is in this that we can amend his definition to highlight yet another function of the social imaginary: the transformation of the culturally transgressive into temporarily acceptable through the activation of symbols that would allow for this to be acceptable. Quite simply, it is the social imagination that allows for the ritual atmosphere that allows for the liminal, which is a transgression from the social imaginary. From this, we must ask at what point the imagination becomes the imaginary.
The social imaginary is something much broader and deeper than the schemes through which people think about social reality. Humans operated with a social imaginary long before they were able to “objectively” think about their religious and spiritual sequences of ritual. The social imaginary is that by which these realms of thinking come into existence. As stated above, it is the means by which objects—be they people, places, cups, or flutes—are transformed into the fuel of the metaphoric and alludes to further transformations.

Later in his work, Castoriadis goes on to suggest that the established social institutions prevent us from imagining new ways, and from even seeing ourselves as capable of exercising that power. I would disagree, based on the above, as well as in light of Goffman’s (1986) work that suggests artistic violations of norms are not disciplining people into right or wrong, rather acting as imaginary experiments that test the tolerance of various social transgressions. It could be said that the social imaginary is thus a concept that progresses towards “reality” by ways of artistic intervention and creativity—this can be either purposeful, subversive, or, as Mucharovsky (1970) suggests in terms of aesthetic norms, an affect of the individual mind conforming as close as possible, failed only by its inability at perfection.

Through Mucharovsky, we can re-think the relationship of the social imaginary and the social imagination. Discussing the function of norms in aesthetics, primarily Czech avant-garde art, Mucharovsky writes on the means by which transformation in artistic movements occurs. Considering this work, the difference of the social imaginary/social imagination complex lies in its purpose in relation to norms. The
social imaginary, based on the inability of perfection in human beings, constitutes the violation of social norms through the constant re-application of them. On the contrary, the social imagination is the direct or indirect violation of the norm of the symbol. If the social imaginary is the symbol accepted from the past without question, the social imagination is the purposeful transformation, not necessarily violation, of that norm for the means of fulfilling “real” desires, those that exist in the material world, set forth by the collective.

The question of the “real” domain in which the social imagination operates was of concern to Sartre (1972). “…the true feelings and the imaginary ones. The latter are unreal and only appear in front of unreal objects, and the apparition of the real one is sufficient to make them run away, just like the sun clears the shadows of the night,” (280). Like Baudrillard, Sartre sees a conquering of the simulacra, which replaces the real. Thus, we must question the relationship between simulacrum and the social imaginary.

I would claim that the social imaginary/social imagination interface is what allows for the creation, and perception, of the simulacrum as real. It is that which enables, in Baudrillard’s case of Disneyland, a castle to not represent some historical construct of power, but to represent the fantasy of power over something, a power that is associated with the iconicity of a castle. The idea of a castle as kingly, and kingly as power, the power as non-threatening is the precise function of the social imaginary, whereas the castle, home of a flying fairy, is acceptable to us (as children) through the social imagination. Unlike the simulacrum, however, the social
imaginary does not ever forge its way into the realm of “real”, but is contained in the social relationships of various social actors. This brings us to a second important factor of the social imaginary- it is more an acted experience, a social convention, than any specific object. Most important is the sensuous experience that comes from projecting a reality onto the object than the object itself.

As the above associates the social imagination as the filter that resides between conscious and unconscious, as the middle point between Freud and Jung, it is the purpose of the social imaginary to negotiate between personal desire and socially informed desire. In this sense, it is itself a phantasy. As such, Freud (1963) offers the ultimate operational goal of the social imagination in utilizing the social imaginary stating “unsatisfied wishes are the driving power behind phantasies; every separate phantasy contains the fulfillment of a wish, and improves on unsatisfactory reality. The impelling wishes vary according to the sex, character, and circumstances of the character,” (37). The social imaginary, being beyond logic, leaves us yearning to create reasons why. For such answers we make use of our individual and social imagination.

Interesting, for Freudian scholars at least, is the phrase “improves on unsatisfactory reality.” As many scholars would ask, how do we know the reality is unsatisfactory to the unconscious if we do not know the unconscious? How do we know what to correct through phantasizing? For this reason, I would argue this quote more apropos to speaking of the imagination than of the unconscious dream. With
the imagination, we know of what we are consciously disappointed, and then can choose the symbol-tools to subvert this mundane.

On this theme of wish fulfillment, the social imaginary allows for this to happen in the pseudo-reality of play. As Lacan (1978) might suggest, “The real supports the phantasy, the phantasy protects the real,” (41). We may pull from the real world the tools to fulfill our wishes, but through activating these elements in the play world of the social imagination, they are taken to be “acceptably transgressive,” as transgression is itself a social construct from the shell of the social imaginary. The social imagination is the flow of the unconscious desires into conscious, whereas the flow of social imaginary is the absorption of consciousness into unconsciousness.

**AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPERIMENT**

**5.1 Introduction**

Their eyes became red and inflamed; inside their mouths there was bleeding from the throat and tongue, and the breath became unnatural and unpleasant…there were attacks of ineffectual retching, producing violent spasms…

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 152-153

Thucydides’ imagery comes from 400 BC, when a plague ravaged the Athenian armies and villages during the Peloponnesian war. The disease-riddled Athenians quickly came to be seen as a feared other; a force of embodied biological warfare. So feared were they that the Spartans abandoned their plans to invade Attica.
Despite its archaic setting, this description resonates with our modern Hollywood descriptions of post-apocalyptic “human” imagery: the living dead, undead, or what are more commonly referred to as zombies. We must wonder the ways in which the characteristics of the modern zombie are related to the imagery created by Thucydides, and how these may be tied to the anxieties that surround militarization. As Diamond (2005) points out clearly, one of the prices of civilization is a period of bouts of mass epidemics, largely unknown among hunter and gatherers until they are devastated by contact with urban civilization. One must question then, the connection between zombie and Thucydides- is the zombie image, predicated on ideas of plague, an image of civilization’s repressed and oppressed underside? Further, are Thucydides and modern Hollywood truly describing their undead or a mixture of that and the social anxieties that surround warfare? Warfare, as put by Fussel (2000), takes us into the threshold of space between conventional life and death, and mechanized warfare even more so- this is the land of the zombie. This is not to say that zombies can be reduced to representations of war. They are more broadly the phantoms that reside in the underside of civilization- which implies the darkest parts of civilization like war, the subordination of persons into economic exchange systems, the systematic extraction of labor power, etc- that only find the surface of social consciousness briefly in tragedy, quickly re-submerged in the sewers of our minds by the hegemony’s prefigured, media-built imagination.

In 1968, George Romero’s Night of the Living Dead was a turning point in American horror; whereas classics had been set in the past and the future with
monsters originating from far away, Romero’s zombies were rooted in the here and the now. They were, and continue to be, tied to all of our cultural anxieties, not just those that surround warfare. This icon of American horror has gained such a strong following that it not only penetrates the social arena through commodity culture, but also through grand-scale public performances in the worldwide; Toronto being of specific interest to this work. Whereas the western war-time anxieties of terrorism, sleeper cells, and biological warfare make the zombie an ideal vehicle for militarized anxieties, popular culture has re-appropriated the ideal to further represent other social anxieties that are not necessarily tied to our militarized efforts. Given the mass militarization of modern society, this distinction is sometimes hard to preserve!

Every year, the dead rise in Toronto. Why are they here, what does it all mean—questions typical of so many ill-fated zombie flick protagonists, are also those of the anthropologist examining the Zombie Walk phenomenon. In the pages that follow, it is my goal to show how, in the Toronto Zombie Walk, the social imaginary is a system that over-determines the Zombie Walk, and comes from previous interactions with the zombie, but what motivates zombies to walk and voyeurs to watch in this festival of the dead are two different notions, fueled by the social imagination. The social imaginary is processed by two different sets of bricoleurs, whose social imaginations produce different interpretations of “why”.

5.2 A Short Lived Zombie History

To know the social imaginary that is the zombie, it is important to recognize some of the past uses of the zombie as a mode of meaning. As Mukarovsky (1970) so
skillfully points out in his work on semiosis in experiences of the aesthetic, while new meanings are created for objects in every new social and cultural context, as well as every new temporal position, the meanings of the past are what make the new meanings communicable to a wider audience. In this sense, a wider audience to the Zombie Walk is able to imagine the new meanings based on the knowledge of past creative manipulations of signified and signifier. That is to say that the social imaginary is transformed into the social imagination through the collision of context and social imaginary.

It is very difficult to ignore the parallels between today’s zombie and the modern interpretation of the monster created by Mary Shelley (1818), both manifestly and symbolically. Although this Zombus Electricus\(^1\) (a contemporary invention accents the Universal Pictures movie) was originally able to think and speak, popular depictions are such that it can only groan and walk about stiffly. The elements of intelligence and ability of reason given to the beast have seemed to escape the social imaginary of the behemoth. Further, superhuman strength has become exaggerated (as a form of further grotesque gigantism to be discussed later), and popular culture has sought to dehumanize the monster more than the author’s

\(^1\) There exists a discourse of present day “zombology” in which Latinate terms are used to describe various “species”. Part of this may have been inspired by Wade Davis’ proto/pseudo scientific work in modern society on zombies- the continued practice more than likely stems from the cult following of many zombie sub-cults in which zombies are the result of scientific meddling. Culturally, it can be read as a way of legitimating what exists as a “subaltern” obsession shared by many general publics. On deeper level, by naming things we create the sense that we control them- zombie science becomes a way of channeling the dead.
original intention. “Frankenstein”, having acquired the name by popular designation\(^2\), has become representative of every “mindless-ness” that stands large in stature.

Truly, the Frankenstein monster we know today is an element of the 1931 Universal Pictures film. This version of the story augments the image of Dr. Frankenstein from young and naïve to greedy and mad, adds an ‘igor-like’ character who brings the master a criminal’s brain, which we can all imagine as a source of symbolism, and conjures the sensational creation scene focusing on electrical power as opposed to chemical manipulation.

It is interesting to note, as we will see in the context of all zombie depictions, the monster in both Shelley’s and Universal’s instances, is an element of post-war imagination. Shelley (1840) offers one interpretation of her novel, and the monster, while discussing her father’s politics:

> The giant now awoke. The mind, never torpid, but never roused to its full energies, received the spark which lit it into an unextinguishable flame. Who can now tell the feelings of liberal men on the first outbreak of the French Revolution. In but too short a time afterwards it became tarnished by the vices of Orléans -- dimmed by the want of talent of the Girondists -- deformed and blood-stained by the Jacobins (Shelley 1840: 151).

In this way, the monster becomes a metaphor of post-revolution awareness; particularly in regards to scientific knowledge. Shelley alleges that scientists are all ‘becoming Frankensteins’, unaware of the consequences of their own work.

\(^2\) The creature is originally nameless in Shelley’s book, only being referred to as monster, devil, etc.
In relation to the 1931 Universal Pictures edition, we can examine Frankenstein as a separate entity than that created by Shelley; a unique post World War I metaphor. A single grotesque monster versus the single Anglo-Saxon Caucasian embodies ideas of the ‘power of one’; the same power which the US army was idealizing during the Great War. In this sense, the zombie figure became both a re-enforcement of military propaganda and a manifestation of the fear of human experimentation. As Rev. Grimke suggested with the Great War:

So far as making the world safe for white supremacy, there is no difference, or very little, between the Central Powers and the Allies. And this war would never have been brought on had Germany been content with the status quo with the supremacy of the white races over all the darker and weaker race. But Germany got into her head the idea of a super man, and of a super nation, and the super man and nation, the military caste in Germany, felt itself to be the German nation; and, that it was the prerogative, the divinely appointed prerogative, of this nation of super men not only to be supreme over all darker and weaker races, but also over all the other white races as well. (Woodson 1925: 693)

So does Universal’s Frankenstein- we are faced with a concern for a racial “other” (green), in a white world, threatening white power.

This notion can also be seen in many of the horror movies and zombie figures of the Universal Pictures horror period, including Zombus Mummificus, from Universal’s The Mummy and the 1932 release of White Zombie. The White Zombie, a notion
towards Davis’s Haitian work, is not the *Zombus Caribbeaus Vivus* of anthropological knowledge, but instead a *Zombus Caribbeaus Mortis*; it being a reanimation of a corpse as opposed to a poisoning of a living body. Each of these emphasize the power of the underdog to change things, although the movie emphasizes a solitary good versus evil in which the “one”, who is the all-American hero, has the power to thwart death embodied.³

The zombie genre began to evolve throughout the duration of World War II. This era gave rise (pun intended) to *Zombies of Mora Tau* and *Invisible Invaders*. According to cultural theorist Mark Jancovich, one of the key shifts that occurred in 1950’s sci-fi horror was a change of emphasis “away from a reliance on Gothic horror and towards a preoccupation with the modern world,” (Janovich 1996:2). “The threats which distinguish 1950s horror do not come from the past or even from the action of the lone individual, but are associated with the processes of social development and modernization,” (2). In particular, the make-up used by Phillip Scheer turns the *Invisible Invaders* into radioactive corpses for a modern day, activated by extra-terrestrials planning to take over the world using the bodies of the dead as shock troops.⁴ In this, we see the psychodynamics of self/other projection and interjection become complicated. The United States, after all, is the only nation to use nuclear weapons in combat, attacking civilian populations. We, thus, must ask who the extra-terrestrials are: are they the Soviets, or a transformed image of “us”?  

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³ This is a rather simplistic reading, based on the manifest meaning of the film. Should one “read” it deeper, many other aspects of the American-self are projected onto and into the monster itself.  
⁴ This movie is filled with nuclear anxiety: the extra terrestrials claim that our nuclear power is too great a threat for the world, thus they must destroy us.
As a result of the social conditions, horror became science-fictional and science fiction became horrific, producing a new style of monsters engineered in the atomic age: the 1950’s produced the fear that consumerism was turning Americans into mindless hordes, and onto this preconditioned notion is built the idea of “red hordes” in America’s anti-communist Cold War sentiment. Further, apocalyptic sci-fi beings massacred beyond recognition captured the all too real possibility of a nuclear holocaust. The 1950’s thus proved to be a transitional period for zombie cinema: voodoo, race, and colonial anxiety are replaced by fears of invasion, brainwashing, and mass apocalypse. The zombie was, at that time, the perfect monster to encapsulate anxieties about the loss of identity, political subversion, and mind-altering powers. Zombies became a way for the American people to discuss the realities of mass death and destruction while in the shadow of the bomb without admitting it’s likeliness. As Boyer (1992) points out,

Down to 1945, prophecy interpreters typically envisioned the “burning day” in naturalistic terms, or as an eschatological event beyond human understanding... With the coming of the atomic bomb, everything had changed: it seemed that man himself had, in the throes of war, stumbled upon the means of his own prophesied doom. (115).

Through Boyer, one can also interpret the zombies as being the Jewish remnants of the holocaust entering our imagination, rising from the grave in their tortured form and assaulting the American sense of accomplishment that came from World War II.
Devoid of their racial undertones, and separated from the Cold War anxieties, the living dead began to lose steam in popular culture due to their lack of relativity to current political and social anxiety. The fear was not in the post-apocalyptic, but the attractiveness of power. It was not until 1968 that this was changed. Whereas the threat of “them” being located among “us” was well underway throughout the Cold War era, Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* shifted this thought to consider that the threat may not be among us, but possibly is us. Many may recall the famous *Pogo Papers*⁵ line of the period, “We have met the enemy, and he is us”. Further, Romero’s addition of cannibalism to the zombie mythology heralded a new social critique via film: the power of the group identity is to consume the individual and the power of one evil to inspire others through excessive violence.

More recent zombie cinema has come to focus yet again on the ideals of a mass apocalypse and the fear of evil nation states. Our popular culture zombies, however, have evolved from Warsaw to al-Qaeda. No longer are they slow and stupid, but fast and strong- boasting protocommunicative abilities amongst small groups. They appeared to be us at first, but are revealed to be “thems”, having fooled their hosts. In many instances (*I am Legend, 28 Days Later, 28 Weeks Later, Cannibalistic Human Underground Dwellers*) the zombie motif remains, yet the monsters have become transformed in ways that do not resemble the classic undead.

WJT Mitchell also notices this shift in terms of dinosaurs' movement from classic movies to the Jurassic Parks of today. Most prominent in the evolution of the

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⁵ Interestingly, this line appears first on an Earth Day poster in 1950 in an extended form, but is then shortened to the above in a 1971 poster.
dinosaur as a symbol of the United States’ drive towards nationalism is the evolution of its movements. From the lumbering dinosaur to the high speed velociraptor, the “king of the dinosaurs,” seemingly ranked by power of violent action, is symbolic of the shift to fast capitalism that covers more terrain quickly, with greater efficiency in killing that terrains occupants. In this also lies a surface explanation of the zombie evolution.

Along with the transformation of “violence” in zombie media comes a metaphor for cannibalism that dates back to 1789 and the Age of Revolution; as the zombie becomes more violent, he represents a revolutionary. In revolution, the opponents, for the sake of domination, swallow up societies’ flesh; thus cannibalism becomes a xenophobic symbol of cultural-adulteration anxieties. Barker (1984) lends to this discussion, as he points out that it is from the 17th century onwards that a long debate occurs in western thought as to whether the self resides in or outside of the mortal flesh. In describing Rembrandt’s The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Kulp, Barker reads the painting as suggesting this very conflict. As he notes, not one of the students is looking at the dead body, rather some at the textbook about the body and some at the audience- who might offer insight on the person.

Further interesting, in terms of zombie warfare, is the fact that the equilibrium of war is becoming disturbed to greater lengths. As stated by military strategist John Collins (2002), war is not won by killing, but by forcing the opponent to over-consume their physical and mental resources until they can no longer hold their path. In warfare against zombies, as Max Brooks (2006) so narrates, the enemy’s
supplies cannot be decimated, only the enemy themselves. Further, unlike conventional warfare, a kill for the undead ‘army’ results in an increase in their numbers, whereas the flow does not work the other way. While the antiquity of cannibalism fantasies being the quintessential signifier of the “Other” should be noted, it should also be noted that it has been recently recalibrated under the conditions of permanent warfare. The question is what element of the social imagination has inspired this?

A great amount of anxiety exists about not loss, but re-appropriation. It is not the loss of the person that is so important, but their conversion to zombie-dom. This is most obvious in the numerous instances in Brooks’ book, as well as many of Romero’s zombie films, where suicide (or assisted suicide) is seen as being better than becoming one of them. Friends would rather see their comrades dead than ‘suffer’ through less-than-ideal proto-life. This has much to say about the ideas of treason and alliance within communities centered around goals, beliefs, and ideologies. As 1950’s anti-Communist protestors might proclaim, “Better dead than red.”

Jancovich’s perception of horror cinema as a world of play for social anxieties has continued to be salient to the zombie genre. From this history can be pulled a sense of the zombie being directly related to the militarization (and accompanying anxieties) of the United States, and possibly greater world history. It is impossible to deny that the international conflicts of today and yesterday occupy, and are the very foundation for some, social imaginations. Of course zombie cinema and popular
zombie narratives have existed outside of the United States on its own premises and with its own motifs, but much of what fuels the North American Zombie Walk is found in this western history of the zombie.

**5.3 Visualizing the Modern Zombie**

Along with the knowledge of the social function of aesthetics, it is important to consider the experiential function of aesthetics; that is, the way the visually aesthetic affects our experience of the thing which we “see”. Thus, the aesthetics that surround the zombie are equally as important in terms of seeing the social imagination and actively social imagining. This will be expounded upon in the section that follows on being the zombie, but for now, it must be kept in mind that what we visually experience is part of what we physically experience. To Merleau-Ponty (1969), seeing is not itself an action that results in vision, rather an act that activates an entire sensorium. Synesthesetically, what we see affects how we feel, what we taste, and what we hear. Seeing is not believing, but the passageway into being able to access the ethos of belief.

The ‘grotesque’ is often something associated with carnival, an event that the Zombie Walk is not so far removed from. Carnival, both in the post-Lent Christian sense and the secular sense, is thought to originate from two Roman festivals: Saturanlia and Bacchanalia. Saturnalia, as discussed by Sennet (1996), was a festival that commemorated the dedication of the temple of the god Saturn. In this festival, marked by reversals of social roles, slaves and masters switched places.

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6. The slaves celebrated a banquet: before, with, or served by the masters. Yet the reversal of the social order was mostly superficial; the banquet, for example, would often be prepared by the slaves,
This festival became so popular, and so engaging, that it eventually expanded from one day to one week. Bacchanalia, while not celebrating reversals, was premised on one: the festival was one originally intended to celebrate women and their breaking of social norms. The Roman senate eventually banned this glorification of the inverse, as happens in many instances of rituals of reversal.

In recent cinema, the zombie motif is apparent, but the grotesque element has faded. This is arguably why movies like *I Am Legend* are often abandoned by people expecting to see zombies in the classical sense: they are given proto- or neo-zombies which break the classic mold of their function and look. In this case, Sontag (1964) would explain the movie as falling from the zombie ‘camp’. Camp, as Sontag uses it, is a certain mode of aestheticism: a way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon under particular stylization and degrees of artifice. This ‘camp’ as defined by Bakhtin in regards to drama, must contain a minimal level of comedy.

Although not often depicted as such, the zombie contains a comedic element in the popular sense by the way he walks, the way he moans, and the way he is stupid. This demonstrates Sontag’s 23rd quality of camp: only that which is the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve can be successful seriousness that fails; and her 36th quality that there are creative sensibilities (i.e. tragedy and comedy) of high culture and of the high style of evaluating people. A certain level of excess of less-than-tasteful elements, like that found in the zombie B-movie world and the work of Romero, is advocated for in order and they would prepare their masters’ dinner as well. It was license within careful boundaries; it reversed the social order without subverting it.
for campy-ness to be present and accountable. Consumers come to miss out, following Sontag, if one has respect only for the style of high culture etiquette of being either alive or dead.

In speaking of zombie ‘camp’, it is interesting to note the various camps negotiated by zombie ritual participants. While most vie for Romero’s grotesque par excellence, they utilize the non-cannibalistic, trickster trope of the zombie movies of the 1950’s. That is to say while they possess the wounds of Romero’s cannibal attacks, they are limited to the mob-hysteria mentality of the 1950’s zombie.

It can be concluded that zombies are based on their grotesqueness, and the amount of grotesqueness of which they are composed. In recent cinema, zombies are being transformed from their physical presence into that of a leitmotif, and consumers are responding with negative reviews. The campy-ness of the popular zombie aesthetic that is the social imaginary, as can be seen by audience’s reception of the ‘zombie’ spectrum, is what dictates the zombie as an efficient medium of cultural critique. By defining camp as a mapping of pleasure, it is interesting to ask what makes camp the preeminent form of gay performance for queer critics, and what is signaled by I Am Legend’s, and by some accounts the 28 ___ Later series’, assiduous avoidance of these pleasures. Could zombies be linked to queer identity by some stretch of this social imagination?

5.4 Methodology: Field and Analytical

In terms of field methodology, I purposefully kept it to a minimum. What was more important than fieldnotes and calculated interaction was the experience of the
Zombie Walk: a regimentation of their understanding of understanding the zombie through my understanding of them. In essence, my approach was not to go as a researcher, but to go as a participant in the subversive act of filling the streets with the dead and making friends who could collaboratively explore this realm. In an approach similar to Belmonte (1979), my approach was not to dig and hunt, nor prod and pry, but to experience information as I navigated the fields of undead-ness.

In analyzing the social imagination in the Toronto Zombie Walk, it is important to make division of imaginaries taking place: the manifest goals are most easily seen in the “audience”, while latent meanings reside in the “zombie”-that is the act of zombie-ing. This dichotomy is not, however, as clear cut as it may seem, as both the meanings are really evaluated from the zombie point of view, more important than the audience is the zombie’s projection on them, wherein they serve as objects. Within both of these categories, self and projected or zombie and audience, lies a division in manifest and latent goals. The manifest is most related to the message, encoded in metaphors that are sent by the zombies and interpreted by the audience, while the latent is the desires that are embodied by the zombie collective.

5.7: He Is Dead and Continuing to Die: A Zombie Ethnography

"Braiiiiinnnssss" he moaned.

"BRRAAAIIINNNSSSS" he an I, dare I say we, with many others, collectively groaned and grumbled as we slipped into a vacant mindset that straddled the realms of conscious and unconscious "being in the world".
"BBBRRRAIIINNSSSS" the ambiguous corporeality of zombie flesh, wounds, and blood moaned as it, we, attacked the Cartesian dualism that instantiates the very realms that we were cavorting.

"BRRRRRRRAAAAAAIIIIINNNNSSSS," as we slipped into internal homelessness; as we longed for an integrated embodiment that is not subordinated to the reign of the cognitive and cogito, a body which transforms thought and mind into mere flesh; one that transforms them into "BRRRRAAAAAIIIIIIINNNNSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS." 

The Toronto Zombie Walk consists of multiple narrative planes, each with its own agenda, but each stemming from one central location. Why someone would walk as a zombie is wrapped into this, as the imagination of both the walkers and the voyeurs who give reality to the event stems from location. The social imagination, the collective viewing of the zombie walk, is derivative of the social imaginary, which reflects a system of beliefs that we no longer believe in. As lore of death and spirits slips into the subjective experience of a lesser community in a modern objective world, the zombie walk is a stop gap, a way of holding onto, the spot in the psyche left empty by our disbelief in the spirit world. Much like Santa Claus, whom neither adults nor children believe, both groups pretending for the sake of the other. Neither voyeur or zombie actor believe in zombies, yet they are acting them out. The goal in this ethnography is to sketch the multiple narrative planes as starting from the social imaginary of zombieness, how one assumes the stream of consciousness of the other (Schutz) and how the zombie should live/act/be (Taylor), and is then
transformed through this social imaginary into two very different experiences of "being" death (the audience), and making a metaphor out of Death (the voyeur).

As I drove to Toronto I contemplated various situations that were possibly to come- what if no one showed up? What if the police intervened and cancelled the event? Would driving this far go to waste?

I reached the Canadian border in the mid-morning, where I had the fortunate experience of talking with a border patrolman.

“You would drive that long for that?!” he said in response as I explained my ‘business’ in Ontario. “What else do you intend to do in Toronto? […] any drugs, liquor or weapons in the car?” Answering the rest of the standard border questions, I was let pass with the warning, “…Don’t get into any trouble.”

I drove for about an hour and a half longer, anticipating my arrival. Questions as to the nature of the parade ran through my head. At one point, I even heard a radio advertisement encouraging people to come and watch, “…the parade starts at Trinity Bellwoods Park at 3pm…” but not to participate. Was participation ‘closed’, or just taboo?

Having reached the park a few hours early, I scouted the place for any signs of the events to come. Children playing on swing sets and slides, a game of soccer in the background, and many pedestrians walking their dogs- it seemed as if the people were unsuspecting. The day was equally unsuspecting, with blue, sunny skies and white fluffy clouds. Perhaps this added to the uncanny that would be felt- that was to come into the space of the park.
I found a restroom in the park where I could change into my costume. What exactly would others be wearing? Would I fit in? Why was I even pursuing this event? The most important question that raced through my mind though was whether or not I had enough blood.

Figure 3: My zombie costume before the excessive drizzling of blood. My costume, in terms of masculine and feminine spectrum to be discussed, was more feminine in that I lacked open wounds.

The massive amounts of people coming in were offset by another event that was occurring at the starting location of the Zombie Walk- a box war. This event, not completely unrelated to the Zombie Walk, consisted of people in cardboard box armor arranged into teams, with the sole goal of destroying the other teams armor. Much like the Zombie Walk, it is a festivity based around destruction, perhaps this was their reasoning for the date and place of the box war?
Distracted by the battle, I failed to observe the pouring in of hundreds of other zombies behind me. As the box war wrapped up, I turned around to head to the start location to be confronted with, by some estimates, 2500 zombies; bloody, scary, yet still smiling, zombies.

In the time between the start of the event and the box war, people conversed and shared gallons of fake blood. It was during this time that I got to know a few people in the crowd, while observing as many as possible.

I came to notice the low minority attendance, which is very indicative to the purpose of the event. On one level, in terms of African-Canadian and Black Canadian populations, one must only ask of the last good thing that came from a mob of white people in costumes, especially one that involved blood. Drawing a connection, either consciously or subconsciously, to the Zombie Walkers as a lynching mob does not require a stretch of the imagination. One, further, could ask

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**Figure 4:** Skeleton fights Pterodactyl during the box war that preceded the Zombie Walk. Skeleton went on to dress-up and participate as a zombie skeleton, as did some of the other box war competitors.
why the ‘others’ of America need to experience other-ness through such a bizarre event.

Prejudice sheds light on why white people participate in the Zombie Walk as well. Considering racism in the west, as Wildman and Davis (2007) point out, our conceptualization is built primarily on visualizing other-ness. While we could explain the entire event away as the longing for otherness, that would overshadow the importance of the age demographic and their unique-ness from those who do not participate. Instead, the idea of being visually distinguishable- a visual subaltern in terms of power relations- is what is most ideal to these participants. From small talk with various groups I found that many made alternative religion, subversive political perspectives, and indistinguishably white ethnic backgrounds a major part of their identity. These were people that were not different; they were constantly over-looked as part of the normal.

The north hill, where these zombies were gathering, was very steep; such that no one could stroll up it during normal park-space traveling- it was typically an unpracticed pathway. The grass had not fully set in the area; soil erosion seemed to be a problem on the incline. The undead were not necessarily fertilizing the growing-space either. The heavy population forced dirt to tumble down the hill like a steady flowing river. The fall of dust and dirt became what geographers refer to as a desire line- a pathway that comes to be impregnated with meaning.

Climbing and writhing up the hill, we had fully transformed into the zombies. Groaning, staggering, and reaching, a libidinous energy passed through us. This
was not the libido characterized by Freud (1932) to be “genital driven”, rather it was the polymorphous and oral libido characterized by the longing for something to replace the something else. It was the libido that comes from doing something ‘naughty’; the kind that coerces children to pull a cat’s tail, steal from the cookie jar, and search for hidden Christmas presents.

![Figure 5: The zombie horde gathers at the steep hill in the park, where a libidinous energy flowed amongst us.](image)

The libidinous energy weaved in and out of the wounds, both visible and those suggested by the blood. “Every person feels it, that’s why I come” (personal conversation, 19 October 2008) was the general story that I was told when asking other zombies about it later.
This libido is, arguably, one of the reasons that the zombie walk, as a social imaginary, remains part of society despite the lack of belief in its figures (as figures of reality). Without this outlet, this mode of libido is lost to us, the western psyche left with a gaping wound. Thus, we have to ask, in what ways the zombie walk fills this wound.

Through the wounds of the zombies, a sense of general corporeality exists. As in Stewart’s (1993) definition of the grotesque as a case of the gigantic, the zombies exhibit a sense of infinite exteriority—what is ‘of the body’ and ‘in the body’ is blurred for one body. The zombie is both container and contained.

It is this case of anonymous corporeality that both creates and facilitates the libidinous energy. As we have seen, the openings of the body allow for the weaving of power, but where this energy is is yet to be explored.
Figure 6: Zombie costumes characterized by large open wounds, like those of this person, allow for the simultaneous creation and transfer of libidinous energy.

Bakhtin (1965) explores the very ingredients that compose grotesqueness. According to him, “Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style,” (303). Further, Bakhtin recognizes that within the grotesque, the boundaries between objects and phenomena are drawn differently than in static art and literature. Grotesque, in his view, is seen in the exaggeration of phallic imagery amongst carnivalesque events: giant noses, oversized horns, and other bodily protrusions visible on the upper-torso. Further, the grotesque is a reproduction of the social phenomena occurring around the body: the law of reversal governs the essential topography of the body. It is turned upside-down, the emphasis being put on the exaggeration of the male genitals as opposed to the male face.
Bakhtin’s ideas become illuminating here as well, although a different dynamic occurs from that which he describes in Europe. Whereas the law of opposites turns the body upside down and exaggerates the lower half, we see in zombies that the lower half resembles more an exaggeration of female genitals than male genitals. One can compare this to the phantasmagoric paintings of Bosch, where the emphasis is placed on bodily openings and exaggerated yonic imagery; with zombies, however, the yonic is truly a *vagina dentata*, in the sense that the openings, as more a feminine exaggeration, are violent consumers intended to induce pain. In this sense, Bakhtin’s definition of grotesque is further fluid. When addressing the belfry as a grotesque phallic symbol, he claims, “The object (grotesque) transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of one with the other and the surrounding objects,” (310)- the wounds of the zombie come to be both symbolically and quasi-physically the transgression of the world on the body. Further, Bakhtin suggests that architectural symbolism is a major component of the grotesque; “…the belfry has a topographic character: the tower pointing upward, to heaven, is transformed into the phallus and impregnates women,” (312). Likewise, the zombie’s wounds open the body to merging with other bodies for the (hopeful) reproduction of themselves.

Unlike Bakhtin’s ideal of grotesque, however, the zombie costume’s emphasis is placed more on oral fetish in zombie-dom than intercourse, as you must ORALLY pass the virus in most modern movies. It appears that zombies are stuck in the early
oral stages of Freud’s polymorphous perversity. Whereas sexual intercourse has become an overall accepted concept of society through its attachment with adulthood, oral sexuality, or ‘reproduction’ in the zombie’s case, are associated with sub- or nonhuman desires of the ideal social normative. It has become blasé to include intercourse scenes in PG13 rated movies, while other forms of sexual pleasure are relegated to R, NC17, and XXX.

The indistinction between the body and the world that outside of it, characterized by the pouring out of blood from zombie wounds, displays cultural anxieties that surround the other. Specifically in US culture, the ideal social normative is disgusted with things ‘not-us’ penetrating us, as can be seen in the debate of immigration from Mexico (where no debate exists about Europe). These anxieties become embodied by the popular imagination that creates and re-creates the undead in the minds of its consumers as being penetrated in such a way that all bodies are equally grotesque regardless of ethnicity. Barker (1984) becomes further illuminating here, as he suggests that Americans imagine themselves as having bodies beyond mere bodylines – a persistent preoccupation in western thought since the Renaissance.

Stewart’s (1993) work offers more ways in which the zombie is an embodiment of our newest anxieties. For Stewart, the grotesque is characterized as an imaginary body emphasizing gigantic: one that represents infinity, exteriority, the public and the overly natural. The zombie, by nature of its exaggeration of the vagina dentata, is a grotesque character because it is both container and contained despite lacking physical boundaries (105). The zombie blurs the lines between what is ‘of the body’,
what is ‘in the body’, and what is ‘not the body’, and thus blurs the lines of what constitute the ritual actors and the viewers, as they too can be considered ‘of the body’ (and the zombie wishes them to be in the body as well). In another sense, regarding the western notions of where the self lies, the zombie can be read as being a giganticism of the body, where too much of the body is the self. Further, following Stewart, the body of the zombie is a body of parts, and the parading of the grotesque is an act and display of, in our case, the ultimate private: the inside of the body.

As a body of parts, Stewart suggests that the exaggeration of physiology is linked directly to the historical context in which it is found. As the zombie medium is constantly in flux, it can be suggested that it is rather an exaggeration of the present, or imaginative future social anxieties. In this sense, the exaggeration of wounds as female representations suggests anxiety with the ‘feminization’ of society and the corrosion of male containment. Economically speaking, we are coming to abandon a masculo-centric industrial economy for one based on service, a vocational field often relegated to women. As many of the actors are not part of the upper tier in which this movement is most prominent, it can be further read as a critique of class career politics, in which masculinity is valued, and where lower classes do work closer related to production and higher class perform work more service based. Zombies, like their subaltern human forms, relish working with their hands and teeth.

Freud (1953: 354) discusses in his work on dreams and neurosis that one of the most common methods of disguising an unconscious sexual wish is through
“displacement upwards,” such as replacing part of the head with genitals. In the case of the Toronto Zombie Walk, the large open wounds, prominently displayed on the upper-torso of the masculine body is vaginal imagery. In this, Freud and Bakhtin intersect to suggest that multiple inversions take place in the ritualized social imagination- inversions of Cartesian logic (whereby the libido takes over thought), bodily topography (genitals shifted upward), social norms (the allowance of death into social space), and gender (female power is desired over male). This suggests that throughout the Toronto Zombie Walk men are given the opportunity to live out their fantasy of being able to directly create through their own direct agency- the Zombie Walk, on one narrative plane, becomes a gateway to fulfill womb envy.

This visuality could, instead, be read as the facialization of castration anxiety. In his work on fetishism, Freud (1924) divulges the greatest anxiety in life as the discovery of the mother's lack of a penis. Aside from the horror of what was always assumed by the child, there is also the constant anxiety that leads children to conclude that the penis has been cut off in punishment for some kind of transgression. Thus, we could read the zombie wounds of the male as the social signifier of the ever-looming castration experienced by the mother.

Instead, however, I read the event, and the energy I felt, as birth envy; the masochistic explanation of castration anxiety has no proof in actions and atmosphere. Freud has often remarked that landscapes, in dreams, often symbolize the female genitalia. Through the anonymous corporeality created by the flowing out

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7 The face is important because, according to Simmel, it is the largest concentration of signifying space on the body.
of the body, the body becomes "of" the landscape; of the woman's genitals that form the unsymbolized ground against which the symbol of the phallus emerges into significance. As Benson (1994) states in terms of Medusa's slaying, "...from her spilled blood springs Pegasus...Imbricated in this myth, therefore, are symbols for the origin of art and the protective power of images," (113). Death, the zombie, the Delphic body, becoming one with the landscape, is a means for creation. Further, as will be explored shortly, zombies are, essentially, about the destabilization of reproduction- a process that is rendered a-gendered and oral, as opposed to gendered and genital.

Figure 7: One could argue that the zombie's very actions are a symbolic assault on the phallic of the environment. As seen in this photo, zombies not only swarm phallic objects in the feminine space of the park (nature), but also actively attack it, arguably, attempting to conceal it.
As is all liminal space, that between the dichotomous genders is dangerous. We (men) are only able to master this mask of femininity through the use of a protective shield- the blood of the Zombie Walk. In his discussion on the two distinct types of blood -controlled and uncontrolled- Levi-Strauss (1985) attributed the first to agentive and the second to unwanted, a dichotomy he labeled as masculine and feminine, or power and menstrual when discussing the Aztecs and Columbians. The blood of the Zombie Walk is most comparable to the agentive; it is actively applied en masse.

Under the guise of masculine blood, men were able to gender swap, as the group is inherently masculine based on its overcoating in masculine blood.

More prominent in women’s costumes than in men’s is the erotic notion of minimal, or lack of, clothing. While men seek to bear the unseen vagina, women use the event to liberate their bodies from the body politics of “attractiveness” that govern the amount of skin acceptable in public domain. Further suggesting the notion of zombie imagery as a vehicle of the desire for femininity is the status of the body of cross-dressed male participants. By obtaining femininity through “hiding” behind its non-metaphoric mask, one could argue that cross-dressers have internalized the womb, and like women actors in the Zombie Walk, have no need to display it, to convince us, on the outside of the body
Figure 8: The female costume above is typical of most other female costumes—sexual in nature, gratuitous amounts of blood, and few, if any, open wounds. Do the rules of feminine beauty, in regards to the fairness of the flesh, apply to zombies?

Figure 9: The person on the right is an example of the way cross-dressing affects costume design. The body that wants to be female follows the female dress rules. In this way, the costume can also be seen as a disclaimer of performance, “a disclaimer of performance serves both as a moral gesture, to counterbalance the power of performance to focus heightened attention on the performer, and a key to performance itself,” (1977: 22)
Figure 10: The nature of this woman as a zombie is interesting, in that she has not used blood or open wounds. The question becomes, is she a zombie based only on the contextualization of her motions in the people she walks with, or is it the violation of visual, public/private social norms?

While the libidinous energy dictates many of the actions of the zombies, they are still controlled by rules set forth by the city and the Toronto Police Department.

As the zombies moaned, the rules of the parade cut through the noise like the clarion call of a trumpet amidst the roar of strings and woodwinds warming up before a symphony.

“THESE RULES HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO US BY THE CITY OF TORONTO POLICE DEPARTMENT...”

“lunch lunch LUNCH LUNCH LUNCH LUNCH...” we responded as they read more rules.
“NO ATTACKING THE HUMANS...STAY OUT OF THE STREET...DAMAGES TO PROPERTY WILL BE PUNISHED...PLEASE ABIDE BY THE RULES OR WE WILL BE FORCED TO STOP...”

At some point, unsure of whether the rules were still being read, I began to join a chorus of moans for “braaiiiinnssss”. Perhaps it was overpowering the rules. The megaphone had become buried in this roar of moans, as the undead became restless. In rigid motion, bodies began to sway back and forth, preparing to take off into the streets.

Through these rules, the police were inadvertently a part of the drama that constructed the imaginary world needed for the zombies- the building of the us/them dichotomy that verified the visual subaltern identity of the group from those who were normal. Further, it served the manifest social objective of all rule creation, to insure social solidarity.

I am unsure of what made the group begin to push forward at that point- I’m actually unsure of how much time had passed between the rules, the yelling and then the moving. I had embodied the role of a zombie and been caught up in the energy that flowed between the wounds of all the undead. It was an energy that only grew throughout the Zombie Walk, consuming my memory of most of the events that occurred in the first half of the zombie parade; an internal homeless-ness inspired by the libido, a sense of teetering on the brink of awareness and trance, conscious and unconsciousness. This is what the social imaginary of zombies is meant to fulfill: the ability for us to lose ourselves in belief of the beyond world, beyond existence. In an
increasingly objective world, purified of death, the zombie walk accesses the libido that exists in believing in death.

As we came to the edge of the park, we entered the commercial district. The park’s edge was gated with a combination of black steel and concrete pillars in Gothic motif. The commercial area was “gated” with a 7Eleven. It was film-esque, in the sense that the dead would first transcend the gates that separated the heterotopia from the “real”.

The zombies lurched through the bustling commercial district in a very serious, and disciplined, way. The expectation was such that you would be a zombie throughout the time in view of an “audience”. This was not fun and games in the typical dress-up, make-believe sense. Zombies were zombies, and the living should be made to be aware of such. They very much were by the undead crashing against restaurant and shop windows.

This is the point at which the social imaginary, that is the unstated ideals that over-determine the Zombie Walk, come to bear on social imagining, the ability to create a zombie world outside of simulacra (Baudrillard 1981), which allows for the creation of various metaphors. Freud (1932) points out that the imagination is already drawn from a pre-existing social situation of the real, the zombie walk remaining in this real as opposed to jumping to the hyper-real of its media mirror (zombie movies). The zombies, while real by their presence, are not real because they fail to be hyper-real, the simulacrum that must exist in a movie for them to be real enough. The repertoire of the imagining of the Zombie Walk is over-determined,
controlled by the social imaginary of aesthetic ideals, by the semiotic repertoire of
the media. That is not to say that new meanings outside of the media are not
fashioned, rather to state that the Zombie Walk’s social imaginary and imagination
are determined by previous zombie situations seen. This is, partially, why Zombie
Walks always occur in cities.

When directly engaging the social imaginary and social imagination in the
Zombie Walk, one can see the boundaries blurred. It must constantly be asked at
what points does the imagination, the creation of rules, become the imaginary; the
bricolage become the unsaid rules that allow for the interaction to take place. In
asking this, we must also ponder the ways in which the social imagination differs for
zombies and humans, while the social imaginary remains the same.

*Figure 11: The Zombie Walk begins by exiting the gates of the park, and entering
into the commercial district.*
Figure 12: The zombies, upon exiting the park, embody the “camp” of zombie cinema. While the essence of camp is a slight level of comedy, the humor creates an uncanny effect, not one of desensitizing the fear factor.

We walked beyond the gates of the park, and it was then, in the gaze of the “public” that the internal battle truly began; the struggle between consciousness and unconsciousness. The important part of this struggle is the gaze of the public.

The social imaginary serves as a vehicle into this struggle, which I would suggest is the “why zombies” on the part of the actors. The social imaginary of the zombie, a betwixt and between of life and death, and truly between consciousness and subconsciousness, is a vehicle pre-destined for this internal conflict conceptually.

For Torontonians, the carnival of grotesque that is the Zombie Walk is a part of life, and is just as real. They have come to expect it in the past six years that it has occurred.
“The zombies just make a mess,” The owner of a shop on Queen Street exclaimed as he cleaned his front window. “They just touch all of the windows and doors, they leave blood on the ground, and worst of all, they scare off customers (personal conversation, 19 Oct. 2008).

People more frequently emphasize the wrongdoings of the zombies- not those of people acting zombie. Often, during my observations after the Zombie Walk, people can be overheard emphasizing the wrongdoings of the zombies- not the people “acting like zombies”. It was never “those damn kids,” or “those people,” but “those zombies,” (personal conversation, 19 Oct. 2008). In this way, not only do people successfully validate the “mask” that the zombie actors wear, but also they validate the existence of the undead. To the Torontonians, the zombies are not necessarily physically real, but mythopoetically real; real in the imaginary sense of being figures with agency embodied by people. In this way, the spectators become the true creators of the Zombie Walk, not those people dressed as zombies. By recognizing the ‘reality’ of the undead, the spectator blurs the line between voyeur and participant in the ritual of the Zombie Walk.
Zombies, in terms of mythology, are only of concern for societies encompassed in the belief of a single chance in life, or consciousness. They serve to show that while one could have a second chance, that it would not entail the freedom of consciousness experience by “average” people. The zombie is thus a disciplining of the value of life, showing that what lies beneath the shell of consciousness is unmediated desire that can never be fulfilled.

The zombie imaginary, being “of death”, allows further for a libidinous energy to be created. Death, in western society, is restricted to the private sphere of life, and bringing into the public, transgressing the social norm that surrounds death, further allows for the ability to be seen. Being seen, after all, is the exciting part of the Zombie Walk. What we must remember, however, is that the actors are still engaged in a realm of play; they are neither dead nor alive, nor fully undead- they are exploring overlapping planes of classification in order to make sense of what it means to be dead and to be alive.
The point of the Zombie Walk, however, does not stop at being seen; the ultimate goal is to see being seen. While the social imaginary facilitates the zombie vehicle, it is the social imagination that allows for the creation of individual zombies.

“Tom” was dressed as a zombie Ronald McDonald. It was the social imagination that allowed for him to embody the standards of zombiedom, possibly even the gender bias of costuming, and the social imagination that allowed him to choose the design and theme of his costume. The imagination, in definition, is the ability to work out manifest and latent desires in a world of play, and in dressing up as Ronald McDonald, we must question how this plays into Tom’s desire. More importantly, though, is to ask the role of Ronald McDonald in the social consciousness of the zombie mob. Given the general atmosphere, the assumption that I will work through in this ethnography is that McDonald’s was a thing desired, but also seen as a threat to the integrity of a liberal, anti-corporate community.
So how does a group process such a desire? Ogden (1979) suggests that, in individuals, there is a process by which negative components of the psyche are projected onto others—he terms this projective identification. If we substitute the individual psyche with the social consciousness, we can wedge out a sense of projective identification by using the elements of the social imagination.

In projective identification, the key process is one in which the negative components of a psyche are projected onto an “object”, in our case other people, in order to see the way that they deal with that certain component. An essential component of this process is that the object be in proximity to be directly manipulated by the projector. The projector, in over-simplified terms, then observes the object’s reactions in order to make sense of their own psyche.
Sartre (1964) explores the idea of the libido being activated from the outside in his existential-allegorical explanation of Jean Genet’s motivations as an author. Genet, an author known for subverting the sexual-moral values of his (assumed) audience, writes because he has lost the thrill of his own masturbatory fantasies—materializing his own fantasies, he gives them independent reality. They no longer are his fantasies, but activated by the knowledge of the “other”- the reader-conferring objectivity upon them. Both Genet and the actors of the Toronto Zombie Walk direct their efforts less towards the other, and more towards the self as other—they are projecting themselves upon an audience in order to obtain libidinous energy.

Tom, and other themed zombies, are taking elements that they desire, yet are contradictory to their core beliefs, into high-class capital areas to examine how other disdaining communities handle the metaphoric monster that the items are. The zombie acting community thus disavows their desire into a community, notably across a class divide, in order to learn the ways in which one handles that desire. Further, it could be read, from the stance of the zombie community, as a justification for their own disdainment. As Berman (1988) suggests in his work on the conflict between modernism and modernization, although anti-conformists communities appear to be in contradiction to elitist communities, deep down inside, they long to be them. “To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction. It is to be overpowered by the immense bureaucratic organizations that have the power to control and often destroy all communities, values, lives; and yet to be undeterred in
our determination to face these forces, to fight to change their world and to make it our own,” (13). Through the Zombie Walk, subaltern communities are able to align themselves with the elite through a realm of play that does not manifestly implicate their desires for that very elitism.

Further, the elements of culture combat cannot be ignored. On one level, zombies invading these places is an assault on the audience, while the elements, such as the desire for McDonald’s, is an assault on the ideals of that community’s elitist ideology. We cannot ignore this element’s function in contributing to energy in the Zombie Walk, although it may/could be a secondary source.

This process of collective projective identification through the utilization of the social imagination also feeds back into the desire for this conscious/unconscious liminal state. As Ogden states, as did the preliminary work of projection done by Klein (1984), the process of projection and manipulation requires a large amount of psychic energy. Through the process of projecting oneself onto the collective that is projecting its collectivity onto another audience, we are able to see the amount of psychic exhaustion that would occur. In conjunction with the trance-inducing sound of moans for brains, the constant process of projective identification allows for a liminal state of consciousness comparable to drug use - a vision quest for lower suburbia.

This process also comes to focus on why “Tom” was expected to act zombie all the time, with no room for play. To concentrate a group consciousness implies one amount of work, but to project that identity itself onto another community requires a
great deal of concentration. For one member of the community to distract others from this realm of concentration, from the trance that lends itself to class-consciousness disrupts the energy required to fulfill the desire of the group of Zombie Walkers. This brings the Zombie Walk back into its original purpose for walkers- to fulfill latent and manifest desires.

In the totality of the Zombie Walk, we can see four main goals.

1) To experience the libidinal energy harnessed in the many narratives that surround the zombie-body social imaginary.

2) To protest corporate entities and class consciousness through pushing the social imaginary through the social imagination in such a way that new things can be said with the old medium of zombies.

3) To understand the ways in which other social communities comprehend the desires that threaten their integrity.

4) And to simultaneously attack the institution of elitism in order to re-assert non-elitists into elitist positions.

Turner (1980) calls the body that is read as text by a public the “social skin”. The social skin becomes the gauge of our interactions with others, in both the singular and plural. The social skin of the zombie, from the perspective of the watcher, allows for the creation of multiple metaphors. The social imaginary of what the zombie should be combined with the context of the Zombie Walk, allows the watchers’ imagination to create meanings contextually drawn from the Zombie Walk that would not necessarily be experienced in zombie movies. The zombies themselves, in the
creation of these metaphoric possibilities, are actively manipulating the bodily topos, the dynamic frontier between the self and the social, precisely in order to rupture standard definitions of social being

This, itself, is a phenomenon of our image-saturated culture. In seeing photos of the Grand Canyon, we think we have experienced the canyon itself—when we arrive; there is nothing that has not been seen already. Perhaps one of the conditions of being modern is the conflation of sight and experience. The Zombie Walk, however, inserts new experience into the visuality of zombie flicks. This experience is one of cultural critique from within the framework of the capitalist imagination.

As discussed by Bachelard (1948), “Death was first an image, and it will ever remain an image, as we do not know what death really is,” (312). One motivation for this ritual to reoccur each year is to work out what death, in regards to the icons of popular capitalism, truly mean and what their killing symbolizes. We further see the motif of the carnivalesque played out, in which we celebrate and honor death, so that he will grant another year of life.

For the observer, the grotesqueness of the zombie takes on symbolic meaning. In one sense, it is a critique of the denaturalized body. Along the route of the Zombie Walk there were numerous fashion stores, make-up boutiques, and lingerie shops. Each of these fulfills the purpose of making the body more attractive: to denaturalize beauty from the body to material culture. Each one possesses a denaturalized body either in reality or by assumption: they are skinny, with large breasts or exaggerated muscles, big lips and the perfect face. As one female zombie pointed out to me in a
lull of zombie acting between shopping areas “I never noticed the lingerie shop before…but the people inside of it needed a good scare. Who would wear that stuff anyways? You’ll never look like the mannequin.” (personal conversation, 19 Oct. 2008). We must wonder if the zombies are re-naturalizing the body, and perhaps re-animating the mannequin. In this wonderment, we must also question whether or not the zombie walk is a form of formal meaning making for the zombies, or just playful inversions of the polymorphous body and its social world. Perhaps meaning making only resides in the realm of the voyeur.

In attacking the symbolism initiated by the mannequin, female costumes are often based around sexual themes in popular culture. From dirty nurses to French maids, an amalgamation of lingerie and flesh is prevalent amongst women of all sizes and varieties. In a way, the ritual acts to liberate female sexuality. In another, however, it is a critique of the denaturalization of the body. Often in public the only people allowed to be ‘naked’ are those whose bodies are attractive from alteration: breast implants, tummy tucks, and face-lifts dominate the visual sexual discourse. By utilizing the excess of grotesque, women force themselves into the gaze of men, both non-zombie and zombie, as sexual symbols regardless of prosthetic beauty. By embodying death out of place, women’s visual sexuality is given acceptance out of place by utilizing a double inversion of stigmatized roles. By occupying a world in which death is visible, women can further break social normatives of sexuality through the mask of the undead, much like Jackson (1978) shows with homosexual inmates utilizing convict status as a way of being gay without suffering the
discrimination that accompanies homosexuality. Like the inmates, to be dead and
dress ‘like a whore’ is easier than just ‘dressing like a whore’.

Further relating to the consumer image and imagination, and encompassing all
possible genders, some costumes can be read as a Benjaminan critique of popular
culture icons. Benjamin (1935) wrestles in particular with the aura of art and
duplications. As was discovered from conversations with many of the zombies
before the walk, the anti-corporate (and thus anti-mass production) statement argues
that the characters they embody, as emblems of mass production, are just as “dead”
as the items they make. For some, they are embedded with the same evil that
comes from the exploitation that they use to make their products, an evil that could
“…make the dead rise” (personal conversation, 19 Oct 2008). This is played out in
many of the spatial interactions that occur, especially among corporate chains like
Starbucks and McDonald’s. It is interesting to note, however, that the Zombies are
themselves a violation of Benjamin’s aura hypothesis. The zombies of the Toronto
Zombie Walk are NOT the original “zombies”; they are merely embodying
reproductions of the artistic creativity of the capitalist imagination. Yet, they arguably
acquire more of an aura than zombie cinema. We come to see that the auratic has
surprising resilience under late capitalism.

More important, some would argue, than the zombie’s symbolism is the
symbolism of the zombie in space. Sennet (1996) refers to this as a spatial
metaphor: a metaphor not created through explanation or discourse, but through the
occupation and performance of bodies in a space. This kind of performance often defies analytical reasoning.

Why would the dead enter capitalism’s belly? After all, by way of their own flesh craving bellies, they become capitalism’s belly. Could it be for more than just brains—especially considering that Zombie Walk participants, while embodying zombie images, are not embodying their cannibalistic actions?

Read by an observer, the conscious actions of the shoppers and the ideological subconscious motivations of the undead combine in capitalist sites, creating a social commentary on the postmodern, late-capitalistic condition of the self. In this space of metaphor, the people acting zombie are not zombies themselves, rather embodied mirrors onto which the living, voyeurs, see themselves as the undead horde with all of its blind consumption. In this sense, the zombies are not the ritual actors, but the ritual voyeurs. Shoppers, inadvertently, are warned against following their instinctual drive to fulfill their upper-class aspirations through consumption. The ritual actors become a mirror through which their selves as high-capital consumers are shown to them as ugly, stupid creatures driven only by their need to consume and not happiness. While consumers seek to define themselves through the expensive goods to be found in these places, the zombies remind them that consumer identity is ugly according to social ideals, and that they should find different ways for expressing themselves, ideally like the zombie who falls short of his own spatial critique.
This spatial metaphor further serves as one libidinal force that fuels eagerness to watch the Zombie Walk. While the zombies acted as such entering the shops and boutiques of Queens street, they came to disembody their acquired personas upon entering the residential district of Bathurst street. The energy that compelled zombies to be zombie faded in the sites void of consumer motivations, yet it returned upon re-entering the commercial districts.

Reading the park from which the Zombie Walk starts as a metaphoric nature, the zombie’s occupancy of the commercial district is a violation of the psychological foundation of metropolitan individuality. Simmel (1950) suggest that the city is characterized by a hypersensitivity to difference; propagated by its constant tempo, occupational and social life, whereas small-town psychology is slower, more habitual, a lesser sensory-stimulated world. The zombie, symbolically, is representative of this small town ideology through its slow movement, its mindless habitual drives, and its disregard for individuality.

Alongside of this horizontal plane of metaphor exists a vertical plane as well. The city, built on a Cartesian logic system, acquires moral value based on the height to which events occur. By viewing the city as a body, the locus of reason exists in the lucid, conscious upper strata of the mind. As Simmel suggests, the city is not the place of emotional, but rational. The zombie, coming from the libidinal underground, which represents the repressed id of the city, invades logic and rationality as a further critique of the monsters that truly lurk in the shadows of such cultural logic.
While these spatial metaphors may not be the direct critiques expressed by the Zombie Walkers, there is something to be said for the logic of why zombies attack in cities and not the country, and why they are constantly attempting to invade spaces of higher degrees of complexity. Even in Romero’s films, one sees a move from country to city, from low to high, and from simplicity to complexity. While those who enable them may not explicitly voice this critique, there is very small chance that these are coincidence. In some ways, they may be unconscious replies to the logical systems that are subliminally engrained into our subconscious.

Deeper reading into the unconscious metaphors that are created through the Zombie Walk also lend to describing the voyeurs less as innocent, and more as witness to sexual transformations. It is in these psychosexual metaphors that one can find a common ground between the zombies and the voyeurs.

The beginning of the Zombie Walk can be read as taking part in nature- ascribed as feminine by our cultural standards. Thus, we can read the zombies emerging from the park as birth. Because the overall aura of the Zombie Walk is masculine, possibly because of the blood distinction previously drawn, we can read men as controlling birth- forcing their own creation. Roheim (1992) notes this as a popular trend in Native American myths. Further, the giant pit in the park from which the Zombie Walk starts allows for another male-controlled birth metaphor.

Upon entering the city, the zombies enter into an alleyway, or the underbody of civilization in Simmel’s terms. However, the city is also the land of the masculine conquered, the landscape assaulted with the phallic, and a constant competition
over who has a stronger phallic dominance in the landscape. Thus, while an alleyway itself could be read as womb imagery, it is also the space between two pieces of phallic imagery. I would argue that the zombies enter into masculine space at the end of the Zombie Walk. In this sense, another Freudian inversion has taken place- the inversion of birth sequence. Further, the masculine city gives birth to humans, as zombies walk out of the alleyway as no longer zombies. Another masculine claim to creation can easily be made.

What one can draw from the Toronto Zombie Walk is that the event, from both the voyeurs' and the zombie's perspective, is about giving birth to death. It is this theme that becomes the crux for the processing of the social imaginary and the social imagination; the theme that brings cultural predispositions (what death is) and makes two separate story lines, imagining contexts, for the event. At the end of the event, while social imaginary continues to be a part of the dispositions of the community at large, the social imagination evolves into two distinct parts- one that is engaged with the experience of the zombie, and one that engages in making metaphor out of the zombie performance, each group consisting of both zombies and voyeurs. Further, in contemplating the event as a memory witnessed in a variety of forms, we must ask if Eros becomes a fetishized object that replaces Thanatos. Is the zombie walk, as a memory, a way to deal with the fact that we are going to die, and already dead? What is death, how is it dead, and what it means as a metaphor are the distinct questions, answered through social imagining, of a

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8 The evidence for two distinct imaginations comes from the fact that if all imaginers were involved with (re)creating a zombie atmosphere, the streets would erupt in utter chaos (and violence) as the living fled from the dead.
community who harbors it on one day, and hides it the next - the questions of a
society in which solace is found by a small community making-believe, pretending to be, the things in which no community believes.

5.6 The Living Dead Tell Many Tales

Zombies live among us. Although a level of irony, ironic and iconic at the same
time as the irony is embedded in the iconicity, exists in this statement, it is a fact. I,
for one, must live with the fact that I was the undead for a day, and with it came all of
the memories of indulgence and critique that occurred on that October day.

It is through this experience, though, that I was able to embody the puzzle that is
why do people do this, why do they dress up like zombies in Toronto? Through
physical presence, I was able to interact and pursue this question, I was able to
probe and reconstruct how zombies symbolically inhabit the world they
simultaneously exist in and create; their agendas, decoding, stories, and use of
objects and artifacts were all made available to me as a fellow zombie. In many
cases, I too fell spell to the libidinous force that came with being the undead - where
and how this force exists was revealed to me not through participant observation, but
full participation. Like myself, the zombie social actors are (in their own way)
concerned with larger structural questions concerning the ways they interact with
space in the present, and how past presents have inspired the ways in which they
ask. The zombies provide a vehicle for grappling with the meanings and effects of
their actions in commercial space, with disregard for the superstructure that leads
them to ultimately be the zombie: their interpretation is only interested in traveling so
far through the rabbit hole. By being one of, and one with, my informants, my own experiences came to help in answering those two ill-fated questions posited at the beginning of this essay: “What does it all mean?” and “Why are they here?” in both my terms and theirs.

While the metaphors are elements of the Zombie Walk, and their significance cannot be ignored, they are but bits and pieces that compose the sensuous experience of being, for a few hours of every year, undead. In this experience, there is not one natural relationship between that which is “acted” and the movie figures it refers to, nor is there a specific causal relationship between the inherent properties of the movies and the “acted” used to denote them. Important are not the various metaphors that arise out of movies and the acting, but rather how the participants engage with and negotiate the multiple metaphoric narrative layers that are built over the Zombie Walk. Lefbreve (1991) states that when we look at the city we are confronted not by one social space but many, all clashing and feeding off each other at the same time. Much is the same with the metaphors of the Zombie Walk- newly developed metaphors do not eradicate earlier ones, but are superimposed on top of them, creating a metaphoric hyper-structure over time, dependent on the many metaphors in order to stand. Graham and Marvin (1996) term the mediation between these as “enhancement,” referring to how the new does not destroy the old but calls into being new mobilities and sometimes intensify older ones. Indeed, as this ethnography has made claims to, this is the case in the Toronto Zombie Walk. The social imaginary, processed through two separate social imaginations (that of the
zombie and that of the audience), is not crushed, but reprocessed in such a way that amplifies the zombies’ most intricate critiques.

I feel it safe to say that George Romero has not only changed the horror industry, but society, as we know it. The icons of cult commodity culture have now become vehicles for self-expression. Marx’s (1976) phantasmagoric image of the self-animating commodity comes to life (pun intended, again). As social actors, by embodiment of the pre-loaded symbol of the zombie, transform physical spaces, we are paradoxically forced to consume the symbolic insurrection of capitalist consumption by way of icons of the capitalist imagination. Perhaps this is the essence of late capitalism, which effortlessly produces and appropriates the possibilities of all of its internal critiques.

ETHNOGRAPHIC CRITIQUE

The naive judgment of a person on awakening assumes that the dream- if indeed it does not originate in another world - has taken the dreamer into another world. (Freud 2005: 470)

Central to the understanding of an image, or that which presents itself to us as image, is through the dreams or visions. As Edgar (1999) suggests in his work on image-based health research, these are the least adultered, least egotistical, forms of mediation.

The literary evocation of an experience, following this train of thought, would be the most reliable way to transmit ethnographic information about the imagination. This is because we would be avoiding the imagination in context. Whereas, in
Toronto, one would be actively imagining while trying to imagine the role of the zombie in imagining, the literary experience allows one to be seated in the panopticon and see all, while remaining beyond the context. The panopticon, in this sense, is the utopia—a place where interference and noise are not part of the signal.

But in ethnography, presuming a goal of intellectual transmission of the event itself, is this lack of noise beneficial? In the case of the Zombie Walk, I would argue that what creates an event where the social imaginary is transformed into two very separate social imaginings, that of “being in a zombie world” and that of “watching a zombie world” relies on the use of noise.\(^9\) While noise in a system is seen as a negative aspect, impeding efficiency, I view it as a mode of creativity, one that influences aesthetic interpretation. In considering the norms of video, we cannot ignore the ways in which the YouTube aesthetic of overly compressed (in terms of quality and time) affects our act of seeing. Likewise, we cannot ignore the noise apparent in the Zombie Walk, as it is what eventually splits the charismatic charge from a unified social imaginary to disjointed social imagining.

Similarly, as time passes, and imagination becomes imaginary, this ethnography becomes less salient. This is rooted in my use of psychoanalysis. As Obeyesekere (1981) discusses with past ethno-psychoanalyses of religious ascetics in Sri Lanka, psychogenetic symbols—those confined to the mind and beyond exegesis by analysands—are locked into an emotional experience which can be unraveled only through our knowledge of the ascetics, or zombies, themselves, not through \textit{a priori}

\(^9\) This is obviously defined by individuals. If watchers were imagining “in a zombie world”, they would be running in terror. The event would have a much different tone if everyone were imagining the zombies to exist in the same realm as their personal “real”
assumptions. Simply speaking, as the zombies themselves change in terms of the community participating, which is inevitable by the increasing involvement, sponsorship, and promotion by the city government, the symbols’ value and origins change. For this reason, as Obeyesekere’s work suggests, psychoanalysis in an ethnographic context is better lent to the origin of symbols and psychic states than predicting their future.

This insight comes from the often-debated difference between public and private symbols. Leach (1958) defines public symbols as those that are common day, and thus reside outside of psychic implication. This definition becomes obviously difficult and quite naive, suggesting that through repetition and shared experiences; symbols lose their psychological significance. Leach, in speaking of religious symbols, states that by these public symbols being overtly laid down in the religious text of Brahmins, they cannot have unconscious significance. For Leach, the unconscious and social are two separate, non-interlocking domains; the former a source of deep motivations and the latter a way of communication.

Where then would one locate the Zombie Walk, so deeply individual, but a shared individual that represents the group’s public unconsciousness? It becomes obvious that such a dichotomy of internal and social cannot possibly exist. Obeyesekere (1990) further suggests the collapse of this border with the concept of symbolic remove: different levels of symbolization exist, some closer and some further away, from the motivations that psychogenetically triggered symbolic
formati
one. The deep motivations of a symbol can exist within or outside of the conventionalization of the symbol.

The public meaning of the embodiment of modernity as well as the libidinous associations of the zombie body are operative in the symbolic complex of the Zombie Walk. Public and personal symbols become a part of the life experience of the individual and larger institutional complex in which they are embedded, and the implications of the Zombie Walk, its echo, extends beyond the experience and becomes part of the lived. For this reason, the symbol- while originally conventional- comes to have different meanings after the introduction of noise from the lived experience.

The imagination seems beyond the ethnographer, and the ethnography. In writing, I notice the ways in which, in order to talk about imagining, I must talk about everything besides the process of imagining. Perhaps this is the noise that comes from transliterating- as opposed to transposing- the experience of socially imagining. As stated before, text denies the sensuous experience of being “in” the book. Experiences are always mediated by a non-sensorial process into a sensorial imagining.

Further, the social imaginary and the social imagination become lost in the translation. What is the process of imagining is already translated to some form of the past, a position held by the social imaginary. In reconsidering Lottman’s systems of modeling, only a primary system exists in the reader reading, and that is the primary system of natural language. By reading, they no longer experience the
zombie imaginary into the social imagination, rather the social imagination feeding into the narrative line of story telling. While a social imaginary exists in terms of the zombie, one also exists in the realm of the narrative that words are put into.

In order to successfully ethnographize the social imagination and social imaginary, authors must move beyond the boundaries of words, especially those of their own. Words, the writing, create a boundary that is itself policed by the intellectual goal of squashing one kind of imagination, the one used in the Zombie Walk, for another kind, that used in quantitative thinking. It must be realized that the borders that are drawn to the imagination and the world, the book and the expository, are more than just those things which cut up the map of our thinking, and thought, lives. They are figured, and come to oppress, our epistemologies and ontologies of what information can be, will be, and has been.

**CONCLUSION**

The social imaginary and the social imagination exist in perpetual modes of transformation; the imagination slowly becoming the imaginary, and the imaginary fading to memory of times once lived, to be reprocessed as the imagined someday. They are as knowing and knowledge, which transform from one to the other based on the broader social and intellectual context as they are brought to light. Quite simply, they are a cyclical time of what has been and what will be.

In distinguishing between the two, large question remain unanswered: what is the difference between imaginary/imagination and pretend/make-believe, and their difference from the daydream. While this essay speaks of imagining and pretending
interchangeably, I would suggest that there are intricate differences in these two terms: what it means to pretend and what it means to imagine brings emphasis on different aspects of the parallel consciousness of play. Pretend, perhaps, more aptly deconstructs the public and personal symbol dichotomy. Secondly, while Freud alludes to the daydream as a substitute of play in the adult world, there seems to be a more conscious recognition of phantasy that exists than dreaming, while not as equal as the phantasy-consciousness that resides in pretending.

Imagining, on the other hand, is not the deconstruction of these borders, but merely their blurring. It is the taking of personal symbols in their psychic condition and making convention the symbolic implication as well as the symbol. While serving as a filter between conscious and unconscious and public and personal symbols, imagining is a process of wish fulfillment. To imagine is to create a world in which the drive, be it *Eros* or *Thanatos*, can be exercised and the unconscious made content. This drive is both public and private- a negotiation and exchange between Freudian and Jungian psyche typology and topography. As Bordieu (1977) states, “...the mind is a metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of reflecting metaphors,” (91).

If metaphors serve as the basis of language, it is communicated through the process of imagining the conditions of said metaphor. Fernandez (1995), considering the narratively delineated image as central to the anthropological task, suggests:

...Anthropology [has] not focused as directly on the issue of consciousness in society as we are focusing here [discussing metaphor/imagination
relationship]. In my view greater directness of focus – that knowing of other minds – can come about by listening to or eliciting some of the key images that, if not actually present in these minds are, at least, put forth by them and/or put into practice by them... But the issue, as we see, is not only that of capturing the other’s imagination, but as much or more, in having our own captured. (27)

The imagination, though being a realm of creating metaphor, is not one of purely text. It is polysensory, incorporating the ways in which we feel with what we see. As Eck (1998) argues with vision as haptic, the senses cannot be cut and hung individually, but must be considered as bearing weight on others. While, in the case of Fernandez, the role of the “said” in imagining is important, this work has tried to highlight that the primary mode of experience the imagination is through the “felt”, be it the haptic nature of sight or the libidinous drive of metaphoric construction or the trance like state induced by hearing. As Edgar (2004) brings to light speaking of the dream,

The night dream is evidence of an interior arena of ‘experience’ within each human subject. Indeed, the dream is the only personal and universal evidence there that there is a noumenal world as well as a phenomenal one; the dream is the counterpoint to all our realities, yet, paradoxically we have the same sense of ‘I’ in the dream as we do in reality. So, the dream provides free access to all to another reality, the Disneyworld of our daytime meanderings; the exotic within if you are an anthropologist... (9)
If we are to study the imagination, and it is beyond the spoken and seen, then in what branch of anthropology should it reside? Perhaps visual anthropology. Morphy and Banks (1997) theorize this sub-discipline to be the study of visual systems or subsystems, or more broadly, visual cultural forms. My contention in suggesting that the study be explored more in visual anthropology stems from the evaluation of the visual being the poly-sensory root of experience, and imagining to be the creation of inner visual forms. In the case of the Toronto Zombie Walk, this internal form is mythopoetic. The mythopoetic function, introduced by Ellenberger (1970), is a creative capacity of the imagination to generate spontaneous imagery, which is open to interpretation-the psychogenetic origin of a public symbol.

Imagining is a significant part of the human condition: examining and experiencing imagining as a social process provides insight into emergent realities that are both adjacent to and removed from conscious experience. The imagination offers implicit knowledge that can prove informative in the process of anthropological inquiry, and as a way of illuminating the personal, cultural, and structural features of semiotic process in various communities. The social imagination goes beyond a linguistically communicable drama that is conjunctively written, but is rather a convergent reality that is simultaneously experienced, unscripted, by the community. Thus, it is not the representativeness of some hidden personal reality that is studied in the transformation of social imaginary to social imagination, rather it is an imaginative exploration of a reality that is funneled into the personal through the active imagining of communities.
REFERENCES


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