SELF-SACRIFICE IN THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE: SURVIVE OR DIE SURVIVING! A MULTIMEDIA CRITIQUE OF NEOLIBERALISM THROUGH SURVIVALIST NARRATIVES

by

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Declaration of Published Work

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university. Parts of chapters 5 have been published as the following article: W. McKeown (2020). 'The Emotion of Survival: Self-sacrifice in Train to Busan'. *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, Vol. 17, No. 1. Moreover, parts of chapter 6 have been published as this article: W. McKeown (2019). 'What Happened to Her Eyes?": Self-sacrifice in [REC]'. *Horror Studies*, Vol .10, No. 2.

Abstract

It is argued that self-sacrifice in the zombie apocalypse can be read as a cultural signifier for a series of neoliberal deformities such as social immobility, the success/failure hierarchies, corporate nepotism, the illusion of choice and ingrained prejudice.

This thesis intends to provide a means of interpreting and categorising audiovisual, subjective, episodic and ludic (gameplay) self-sacrifices. It aims to identify how representations of self-sacrifice exist as a symptom of social hierarchies and ingrained competition. Therefore, self-sacrifice is part of a cultural vocabulary that is constantly pointing out the flaws of the neoliberal state and is not being correctly understood.

This study matters because it breaks new ground in the analysis of self-sacrifice and identifies representations of self-sacrifice as part of a cultural language that signifies the twisted values of modern neoliberalism. Case studies examining a range of media will present audiovisually similar accounts of self-sacrifice; however, the cultural impact, resonance and legacies will differ accordingly. The formation of self-identity is therefore reconfigured in both textual and contextual conditions.

Furthermore, because society is more frequently subjected to videos, texts, films, series, games apps and other means of information transferral, one of the defining characteristics of modern neoliberalism is its intermediality. It is for this reason that this thesis shares such intermediality. With each shift to the examination of self-sacrifice in a different medium, theoretical critiques of neoliberalism take on correspondent nuances that endeavour to give the upcoming analysis depth

and contemporary relevance. It outlines how competition has become ingrained in social constructions. It makes evident how pre-existing socioeconomic hierarchies are reinforced by the internalisation of failure. This thesis argues that representations of survival and the compulsion to survive are not about resourcefulness but a competitive sense of outlasting and gauging self-worth by the failure of others.

The illusion of choice is also put forward as another way of interpreting the cultural defects of neoliberalism. Survival and self-sacrifice are both linked in the zombie apocalypse because they present a choice in a situation that removes all aspects of choosing. They depict an impasse that can only be traversed by self-appraisal and self-evaluation. This is because the choice to self-sacrifice is invariably set up by a previous infection or disadvantage and survival is, by definition, operative in scenarios that restrict a character's propensity to survive. The winners survive and everyone else dies out. Again, this can be related to constructions of social competition and its tendency to reinforce the positions of those at the pinnacle of cultural hierarchies. This thesis also examines the illusion of choice to various degrees in interactive media, weighing up how the concept of self-sacrifice can represent a disruption to reestablished socioeconomic hierarchies through incremental self-enrichment.

Contents

1. Introduction

This thesis will contribute to the field of screen studies a long-form examination of zombie apocalypse narratives from the advent of the internet age to the 2020/21 COVID 19 pandemic. It will do so through the analysis of film, television series and video games through the lens of contemporary critiques of neoliberalism. Both the zombie trope and self-sacrifice have been the subject of many filmic and literary narratives in the last century. The confluence of these two ideas takes on particular cultural value as they intersect in the sociopolitical period of twenty-first century neoliberalism. Thus, how does self-sacrifice in zombie narratives illuminate a cultural defect in modern neoliberal conditions? This thesis will analyse representations of self-sacrifice as a symptom of neoliberal social deformities. It will be argued that self-sacrifice in zombie apocalypse narratives represents a transaction that cements the place of the dominant socioeconomic class. It is a stratification of communal and political hierarchy, positioning those who do not survive as failures and those who do as successful. The failures become zombies in recognition of a collective propensity to gauge self-value by the failure of others in the narrative world which can be read as part of a wider contextual trend. Survival is therefore a competitive endeavour that represents social constructions of success and economic hegemony. A cultural defect is realised when self-sacrifices in zombie discourse are equated to heroism; the opposite is true: it is an act of systematic subjugation in a thinly veiled guise.

This thesis intends to explore how self-sacrifice is both culturally misunderstood by existing theoretical readings, as will be demonstrated in the literature review, and contextually resonant as it is imagined in the zombie apocalypse, as will be demonstrated in this study's four case studies. It will unpick how heroism, zombiism and survivalism are presented in screen media, positioning self-sacrifice as a means of understanding modern critiques of neoliberalism. It will be argued that the key deformity of internet-age neoliberalism is how individuals are led to gauge their self-worth and

the appraisal of self-value inherent to self-sacrifice zombie apocalypse is sensitive to such self-projection. Self-sacrifice in the zombie apocalypse is therefore a transactional gesture by which selfhood is exchanged. How this transaction can convey meaning is the primary focus of this thesis. Each chapter and subsequent case study will examine self-sacrifice in terms of its context, subjectivity, legacy and interactivity.

1.1. Theoretical Background

The concept of self-sacrifice and its significance is acknowledged by scholars but tends not to be explored in detail. Christopher M. Moreman and Cory James Rushton, recognise that in zombie narratives 'one member of the group will always (sic.) sacrifice themselves in order to save the rest' (2011: 1). This idea is not, however, the subject of their study. The dissection of the nature and subjective experience of fear that they provide is important to this thesis in the following literature review, yet their previous statement leaves questions unanswered. Primarily: why is it the case that one group member will sacrifice themselves to save the rest? And why has this question not been addressed by themselves or indeed other theorists? The cultural meaning of representations of self-sacrifice is a scarcely addressed area of scholarship. Perhaps the most insightful contribution to writing on self-sacrifice in general, that is not in reference to representations of self-sacrifice in constructed narratives, is provided by Jean Hampton. In questioning the intended benefit of self-sacrifice, Hampton questions the generally accepted heroic default perception of self-sacrifice. In considering acts of personal sacrifice whereby someone might take too much on, to the point that it is detrimental to others. For Hampton 'not all self-sacrifice is worthy of our respect or moral commendation, and not all such sacrifice really benefits those at whom it is aimed' (1993: 135). This idea is even more relevant when it comes to depicted versions of self-sacrifice in zombie narratives. It will be argued that even though self-sacrifice is intended to help the rest of the group, representations of self-sacrifice resonate with an internalisation of social hierarchies that culturally

benefit the influential dominant social class. How this process operates will become clearer further into this study.

Chris Heathwood outlines a paradox of self-sacrifice, again without references to textual self-sacrifices (2016: 143). He contends that self-sacrifice can only be classified as such if it is both voluntary and not in the subject's best interest. However, if the subject decides to commit to self-sacrifice, it must be, to some extent, in their interest through the proxy of benefiting others. Because this paradox exists, the classification of self-sacrifice, represented or otherwise, is difficult. This study puts forward a more flexible definition of self-sacrifice, because, as seen with Heathwood's example, categorising self-sacrifice by strict terms, causes those terms to break down. It is for this reason that this thesis operates with the following definition of constructed self-sacrifice. It is argued that self-sacrifice is necessarily constituted by a character's death that comes to present an escape route for other characters. It must have that immediate utilitarian function. It must allow for the (temporary) transgression of the infected hordes. There are two other aspects that define self-sacrifice but they operate on an and/or basis: infection and volition. If an infected character succumbs and provides this utilitarian escape blueprint, their limited time is perceived as a fair trade for the lives of uninfected others. Such an exchange comes to outline this eternal sense of weighing up, of value exchange and optimisation that, has become the epitome of contemporary neoliberal processes. What may seem like the most characteristic aspect of self-sacrifice, the volition, the stepping up, is actually subordinate to the act's practical value and its enduring, pressurising legacy. Volition is required to a degree but this is more as an acknowledgement of responsibility. It becomes an outward representation of selfhood that submits to the hierarchy of incentivised individuals and reveals sociopolitical power-structures as hypostases that zombie apocalypse narratives cannot forget or separate from.

Such a pliable definition ensures continuity to the study of self-sacrifice in a range of different media. This is important because it facilitates the changes in form that allow for detailed conclusions to be made with each shift in mode or form. Allowances for changes in form throughout the course of this thesis are contextually relevant because the contemporary experience of the individual constantly shifts between media, the audiovisual and the interactive. It is also important to note that demoting volition, which is usually esteemed in the appraisal of self-sacrifice, enables the theorisation of an interactive, ludic self-sacrifice, as understood as self-sacrifice actualised through gameplay, because it is not the choice to make the self-sacrifice but its legacies that constitute its contextual resonance.

Portmore offers a take on self-sacrifice that offers a common ground with the other two focuses of this thesis: zombie narratives and neoliberal critiques. Portmore holds 'that the greater the amount of self-sacrifice that goes into achieving a goal, the more its achievement contributes to one's welfare' (2007: 13). Self-sacrifice, neoliberalism and zombie narratives are all goal-based. They all contribute to a goal-based teleology that is usually centred on degrees of survival. The meaning of the prevalence of the survival goal will become clear as this study progresses. This commonality and its relation to the zombie narratives will be explained first, followed by relations to neoliberal critiques.

Many interpretations of the zombie trope outline the similarities between the zombie legion and humanity. Dan Drezner notes that the humans and zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) are difficult to distinguish from one another, a sentiment echoed by Romero himself (2011: 115). For the purposes of this thesis, this comparison will be referred to as the 'they're us' theory.

However, this is not a line of argument that stands up to the scrutiny of this study. Rather, it is exactly how the zombie and the human are different that provides a basis for this thesis to generate meaningful enquiry. It is the trace of the human, the imprint of what the subject once was that demonstrates the cultural resonance of the zombie. As will be seen in the following literature review, the 'they're us' argument translates more eloquently to 'they were us'. This zombiisitic alignment harmonises with the position of Lauro and Embry. They propose the notion of the zombie as the anti-subject, the shell of a person that is horrifying because it is empty; '[t]he zombie is different from other monsters because the body is resurrected and retained: only consciousness is permanently lost' (Lauro and Embry 2008: 89). In zombie-based narratives, the sacrifice is frequently already infected with the zombie virus, or soon-to-be one because of the action that the self-sacrifice requires. The effect and legacy of self-sacrifice comes into being through the absence of its subject, its sacrificial victim. In many ways, they meet in the middle, the sacrifice and the zombie both come into being through absence, they exist because of what they once were. This structure is further mirrored in the reimagining of a zombie apocalypse, or in other words, an end that is beyond the end. This is recognised by Stacey Abbott who states that 'pluralising apocalypse is of course oxymoronic. The fundamental meaning of apocalypse is the end of everything. There can be only one apocalypse' (Abbot 2019: 5). However, as Abbott continues to point out, events take place beyond the 'end of the world', a legacy beyond the end of a life. Self-sacrificial legacy and the pressures it can instil have significant cultural repercussions with regards to critiques of neoliberalism.

This thesis will go into more detail as to the context, motivations and history of Neoliberalism in the upcoming literature review but, because this thesis will mention and navigate the idea of neoliberalism from this point moving forward, a brief definition will be set out. Neoliberalism is a wide reaching and global ideology that was conceived early in the 20th century, implemented in the

late 20th century and has found new resonance in the internet age. This internet age neoliberalism, referred to in this study as contemporary neoliberalism and will be the subject of this long-form study. Chapter 5 examined a distinctly South Korean subsection of neoliberalism and does so with the sensitivities of the local historical context. In doing so this chapter indicates how globalisation is a key component of modern neoliberalism because of the inherent interconnectivity that the internet age allows for. This thesis does not however go into further detail into the effects of globalised neoliberalism because it, instead of moving outwardly, moves inwardly towards discussions of neoliberal ideas of selfhood and self-value. Being a screen studies thesis, there will be more of a focus on what on-screen representations of tropes and values resonate with in the context of contemporary neoliberalism; in other words, this thesis is concerned with how zombie apocalypse narratives resonate existing critiques of neoliberalism rather that providing new insight into the complex workings of contemporary neoliberalism.

The key deformities of neoliberalism that this study recognises are the quantification of qualitative experience, a phenomenon often observed in but not limited to the workplace, by which individuals are quantified in terms of their performance, which leads to a direct negative impact on the quality of the performance. The most famous example of this is recognised by Paul Verhaeghe in the American multi-national Enron (2014: 122). This was a company that fired the bottom performing employees in a bid to motivate its workforce. In reality, these measures led to the falsification of stats to the point that the company was dissolved. It is the embodiment of quantity over quality to the point that there becomes only quantity. Wendy Brown identifies neoliberalism as a fundamentally indistinct and constantly shifting paradigm, noting that its ‘inconstancy and plasticity cautions against identifying its current iteration as its essential and global truth […] (2015: 21). To mediate the fluid understanding of exactly what neoliberalism is in previous scholarly discussion, Brown identifies its key problematic feature, the economisation of the individual. This is a

methodology that this thesis will also employ because the problematic deformities of neoliberalism can be more clearly discussed than the nature of neoliberalism itself. Brown posits that 'both persons and states are expected to comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value […]' (2015: 22). It will be demonstrated that Brown and Verhaeghe are referencing the same deformity that this thesis will go on to critique. However, Verhaeghe's position will be taken on because of how it compliments a Lacanian reading of the zombie and self-sacrifice. Lacanian readings of the monster appear frequently in film and television studies as will be addressed in the following literature review (Žižek 1997, Pueyo, 2017, Fehimovic 2018) and this is because of how both screen media and monsters can be read as a mirror image of societies collective values and anxieties. It will be demonstrated in this thesis that the quantification of the individual becomes an all-encompassing endeavour which leads to instances of stress and anxiety in personal spheres; this is a topic that is discussed in both chapter 5 and chapter 7 in reference to the binging of TV series in the latter and the difficulties of work/life balance in the former.

This also study follows William Davies and Jesper Juul in the criticism of neoliberalism. For example, Juul makes connections between the experiences of failure in video games and in neoliberal settings which is particularly pertinent in chapter 8 as it discusses zombie video games. Juul is important to this thesis because his work ties together video game studies, various critiques of neoliberalism and the notions constructed and virtual failure. Another key deformity of neoliberalism becomes apparent with the discussion of Juul is how socially constructed notions of failure can be read as systems of oppression that entrench pre-established social hierarchies. Juul examines failure in reference to neoliberalism in detail, making the case for the possibility of reclaiming failure as a means of disrupting social hegemony. (Juul 2013: 7). It will become clear further into this thesis that zombie and apocalypse narratives fetishise survival and over-determine

its importance to the point that it becomes a metaphor for upholding the status quo of social and political hierarchies. Naomi Klein notes a similarly concerning trend regarding neoliberalism and inequality. She recognises that corporatism is part of the neoliberal system as it 'blurs the lines between government and business - Its main characteristics are huge transfers of public wealth to private hands, often accompanied by exploding debt, an ever-widening chasm between the dazzling rich and the disposable poor and an aggressive nationalism that justifies bottomless spending on security' (Klein 2008: 15). Following Klein's line of argument, the disparity between the poor and the people who make the decisions on what public money is spent on is another key deformity of neoliberalism because it ensures that social hierarchies are systematic. In other words, the system of neoliberalism benefits from the manipulation of scarcity. Chapter 8 also discusses the illusion of choice, which is demonstrated to be another damaging mutation of neoliberalism by which the individual can choose between an almost infinite number of commodities and services so long as social immobility is upheld as a precondition.

David Harvey has analysed how the implementation of neoliberalism in a number of countries was posed to the individual as the potential for more freedom, when in reality it was a way of reestablishing the ruling class; now under threat from the decline of global capitalism in the 1960s Harvey 2007: 27, 28). Harvey continues to recognise that 'neoliberalism has not proven effective at revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded in restoring class power' (2007: 29). As can be seen with many of the cited neoliberal critiques, neoliberalism is about cementing the position of the ruling class. William Davies contends that neoliberalism makes competition a moral justification of extreme inequality. He contends that a rise of psychological, behavioural and sociological disorders as a result of a pathological cultural commitment to self-interest is the definitive symptom of neoliberalism (Davies 2012: 2-3). As will be seen in the subsequent literature review, Davies also makes the observation that ingrained notions of social competition have become

a means of justifying extreme inequality (2014: 37). Harvey recognises that '[f]or any system of thought to become dominant, it requires the articulation of fundamental concepts that become so deeply embedded in common sense understandings that they are taken for granted and beyond question' (2007: 29). It is this entrenchment of competition as a moral compass for the justification of inequality and this is why Davies observations are crucial to this thesis.

Therefore the definition of neoliberalism for this thesis overlooks neoliberalism's nature as something that is difficult to categorise or identify and instead focusses on its deformities, its values that are twisted and/or damaging to social spheres. This thesis will therefore include analysis that relates to these deformities and they are as follows: the quantification of qualitative experience in such a manner that leads to anxieties and deformations of self-value, the illusion of choice as understood as a system that purports to give freedom to the individual, but is instead an indication of their inability to affect their social surroundings, the entrenchment of social hierarchies, the shift to competitive morality as a justification for inequality and the construction of failure(s) as a means of reaffirming a pre-established ruling class.

1.2. Justification for Zombie Discourse

Self-sacrifice in non-zombie narratives has been omitted from this study partly because there is such a substantial body of self-sacrifice representations in zombie discourse to draw from, but also because of how this thesis positions the preexisting critical theory on the zombie. There is a considerable amount written on the origins and metaphorical meaning of the zombie, relating it to anything from ecocriticism or colonialism to the cold war (Bishop 2009: 1). It is important to note that the zombie takes on a transformation in the 1960s and 1970s with the contribution of George Romero. This will be discussed in more detail in the following literature review chapter but for now it can be understood as a reworking and contextual reinvention of a zombie that was initially a

product of hypnotism through the imposable will of voodoo masters. Romero Americanised the zombie and positioned it as a trope that was sensitive to the development of consumerism with the *Dead* series of films. The ways in which these sensitivities can be read locate the mindless undead in shopping malls; seemingly likening shoppers to zombies through a commonality of consumption, albeit with differing differing goals and degrees of gore. Conversely, the zombie can be read as the bringer of ruin to the urban space, offering up a figurative reset and admonition of the consumerist regime. Self-sacrifice offers a way into the logic of overconsumption and how it has become a common compulsion in contemporary cultures and exactly how this is the case will become clear in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. There are many examples of self-sacrifice that occur in different genres as part of narratives that are not accompanied by zombie tropes. The reason that this thesis does not examine self-sacrifice outside of zombie discourse is because certain genres, historical war narratives for instance, may represent self-sacrifice with degrees of genuine heroism, motivated by altruistic personality traits. Self-sacrifice in non-zombie apocalypse narratives is not always symptomatic of a twisted and directionless society that revels in viewing and depicting self-destruction. However, when represented in zombie discourse, the above is almost exclusively the case. This is because the self-sacrificial victim is frequently infected, or at some other state of compromise before the realisation of the self-sacrifice is fully crystallised in their mind. Though what can be short-handedly referred to as ‘genuine’ self-sacrifice, outside of zombie discourse, could still encounter the difficult and potentially damaging pressures of self-sacrificial legacy; the depiction of pressing on so that the sacrifice was not in vain is most rampant within zombie narratives and is thus the subject of this investigation

1.3. Thesis Aims

1.3.1. Methodology

The methodology section of this thesis intends to set up a framework for classifying the many self-sacrifices represented in zombie apocalypse narratives. It will survey many self-sacrifices in a range of audiovisual media and propose that there are roughly two variants of self-sacrifice. This categorisation is put into place not for the empirical function of distinguishing self-sacrifices from each other formally; rather it is a selection criteria that is used to outline paradigmatic examples of self-sacrifice for the following case studies. Moreover, it proposes that many examples of self-sacrifice operate in a visually similar fashion to each other. This is important to the progression of the thesis and also part of why this study favours intermediality in its approach to analysis.

1.3.2. Case study 1: *Train to Busan*

The first case study is centred on *Train to Busan* (2016, Yeon Sang-ho) which is established as inclusive of one of the paradigmatic examples of self-sacrifice in its final scenes. This chapter aims to situate a paradigmatic example within its neoliberal context and outline the resonances and paradoxes that arise from this process analytically. It also aims to outline the different ways in which self-sacrifice can be interpreted and argues for both an emotion-based reading of the sequence and a survival-based one. The final intention of this section is to explore how self-sacrifice in the zombie apocalypse is a transaction and that it is selfhood that is being offered up for exchange. The meaning and value of that selfhood can be ascertained in the following chapter by dissecting a comparatively more subjective construction of self-sacrifice.

1.3.3. Case study 2: *REC*

Having already been established as inclusive of the second paradigmatic self-sacrifice(s), the second case study follows the interconnectedness of self-sacrifices in *REC* (2007, Balaguero, Plaza). This chapter analyses the subjective construction of self-sacrifices in an example of found footage film. It aims to appraise how the existence of a self, as represented by the formal

construction of a point of view, affects how selfhood can exist and be meaningful in this film and others like it. It also aims to study the connections between self-sacrifice and how they can lead to a pressurising legacy that shares parallels in neoliberal sociopolitical defects.

1.3.4. Case study 3: *The Walking Dead*

The third case study intends to examine how the legacy of self-sacrifice operates over longer forms of audiovisual media. Whereas films are usually less than three hours long, *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022, Darabont) takes place episodically over dozens of hours. This makes for a difficult choice in the selection of sequences to analyse but it also means that self-sacrificial legacy can be examined over longer narrative periods. This chapter aims to understand how the legacy of an episodic self-sacrifice can flow and change along the duration of the text. It arrives at the deduction that the structuring of time operates as an illusion of choice.

1.3.5. Case study 4: *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light*

The intention of this fourth and final case study is to gain greater insight into the connection between the illusion of choice and neoliberalism. To do this, an interactive and ludic pair of texts are consulted. *The Last of Us* (2013, Druckmann, Straley) and *Dying Light* (2015, Ciszewski, Marchewka), video games, are analysed with the intention of understanding the illusion of choice in a contextual but also a mechanical sense. The aim of this case study is to demonstrate how an interactive example of self-sacrifice can exist, one that represents a self-sacrifice and correspondent legacy outside of diegetic time that can result in a process of self-improvement. This study positions a ludic, version of self-sacrifice as a means of disrupting the established socioeconomic and sociopolitical order. It aims to compare examples of neoliberal and virtual, play-determined failure as part of a process of self-sacrifice, as a means of disrupting various forms of pre-existing capitalist hegemony.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Foreword

Having established the structure, aims and scope of the thesis, the critical context of existing scholarly interest will be explored. The following literature review will appraise critical backgrounds surrounding the trope and history of the zombie, the formulation and critical evaluation of neoliberalism, concluding with how Lacanian theory can be used to formulate the conception and value of selfhood. Theory pertaining to Deleuzian conceptions of flow and productive desire and the criticism of video games are explored in chapters 7 and 8, but the appraisal of these two schools of thought are more intrinsically linked to the sections of analysis they accompany and are therefore examined in the third and fourth case studies. The upcoming literature review forms the basis of the rest of the thesis, drawing on a variety of schools of thought and making room for nuanced readings of self-sacrifice as a symptom of neoliberal social deformities.

2.2. The Apparent Self-loss Metaphor in Zombie Culture

Dan Drezner points out that '[t]he actions of the zombies and the zombie-hunting posse in *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) are barely distinguishable from each other' (2011: 115). Furthermore, characters from both sequels, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985), reinforce this idea by observing further similarities between the living and the undead become more apparent (Drezner 2011: 115). 'They're us', in its spoken or indeed metaphorical repetition, has always been an irreducible kernel of George Romero's reconfiguration of the zombie myth. The defining characteristic of the zombie at this transitional epoch of its development is that zombies and humans are not as different as society would like to think. But there are some limitations to this observation. Firstly, it is confined to its temporal constraints; the zombie's cabalistic voodoo origin and the 21st century zombie as it is known today complicate the 'they're us' model and must be

accounted for (which is something that will be done further into this chapter). Secondly, and this ties in neatly with the first reason, the zombie has transgressed its filmic medium. It now appears in television, gaming, virtual reality, comic books and more. Romero's zombie is easier to categorise because it was the first to wreak havoc and prosper as it came away from the significant crossroads at the heart of zombie mythology. It was easier to reduce down to its defining trait because it was the first of its kind; it was a product of Romero and Russo's vision and not of what it came to be: a cultural phenomenon. But this deduction in itself raises further questions regarding the authority of Romero/Russo's creative vision and whether the post-Romero, multimedia zombie in all of its chaotic diversity can ever be tethered to a single definitive meaning. The solution to the latter has already been proposed. The field of Zombie Studies has long endeavoured to map out the meaning of the zombie as a trope in discourse. The results of this endeavour have been varied and will be examined further into this chapter. On account of its metaphorical pliability, the zombie can be read in a range of ways and with differing cultural resonances. For this reason, the line of questioning changes from 'What does the zombie mean?' to 'What is the zombie's defining characteristic?'. This is because the meaning of the trope can often be implicit whereas characteristics that define zombie culture would have to be clear cut. Romero and Russo's influence over subsequent or descendant zombie representations is integral but, at the same time, part of an ongoing process of being overthrown. The Barthesian mantra 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author' (Barthes 316: 2012) is apt here but it needs modification. In this case, the (un)death of the author relies on the challenge of the reader, who questions, refines and counteracts to point out the vital force that drives the wider zombie discourse. Does the zombie virus spread exclusively from biting? Or can it be induced merely from the exchange of bodily fluid? (Rushton and Moreman 2011: 2) This representational discrepancy is captured in the difference between *The Walking Dead* (Kirkman, 2010-) television series, where zombie viscera is rubbed all over the body to mask the human scent and *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002) where a chance zombie blood droplet

finds its way into an unfortunate soul's eye socket, infecting him immediately. *28 Days Later* was also largely responsible for the sprint or shamble debate, whereby it is questioned whether or not the limited movement of Romero's formulation of the zombie is definitive, another point of contention that arises in the existing body of zombie literature (Drezner 2011: 53). Sarah Sutler Cohen notes that even 'how you [would] kill a zombie' (2011: 184) is often ambiguous; where most zombie-rules agree that a well-placed headshot will suffice, there are different rules to do with burial, burning and water traversal that are challenged by the film, *The Girl with all the Gifts* (McCarthy, 2016) and the Korean television series *Kingdom* (Seong-hun, 2019). Both of these texts also question the zombie's capacity to endure daylight and propose different life-cycle patterns. What is of importance here is that, coming into the 21st century, there is a succession of slight changes to the representation of the zombie. There is a diffusion of rules, undulating through varying sociological advancements and anxieties. Insistent tinkering with zombie form propagates zombie meta-dialogues and the debates that come with them. This slippage is the reason why the Romero zombie mantra 'they're us' must be redefined in order to mesh with more recent zombie iterations. However, any changes to how the zombie is understood must remain consistent with its historical origin and the corresponding social context. Alterations to the DNA of the modern zombie must be, at most, a repositioning process, drawing from a commonality that aligns the representation of descendent zombie versions.

There are many scholarly interpretations of the zombie as recognised by Kyle William Bishop who proposes that the post-Romero zombie 'manifests modern apprehensions about the horrors of Vietnam, the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement,'(2009: 1). He continues to note that the zombie narrative foregrounds the unknowability of the other, the unnerving anonymity of the crowd and therefore relates to the anxieties pertaining to terrorism and the war on terror as it is known

today. Katherine Sugg takes a different approach, contending that the zombie's role in the apocalypse promotes a prevalently masculine sense of self agency with 'roots that are ironically exposed by the popular cultural referent that dominates *The Walking Dead*: the frontier myth' (Sugg 2015: 793). By comparison, both interpretations seem quick to locate the zombie's theoretical resonance in a specifically historical American context which seems remarkably incongruent to the modern zombie's now a-geographical, present-rooted, insistence for living flesh. Coupled with how characters of the genre frequently renounce the old world, the preexisting, infection-free utopia that once was, it is difficult to define the zombie in terms of its American historicity or, in fact, in relation to anything that is solely retrospective. Sugg's treatment of selfhood is more direct. She suggests that society exists as an extension of self-agency and is susceptible to hierarchical orders, be they apocalyptic, masculine or both. Therefore, the zombie, with its lack of agency and stark uniformity of drive, is secondary to human choice and therefore a counter-point from which identity, how individuals choose to present themselves, can arise (in the form of how survival is achieved). The issue with Sugg's definition is that the zombie is a means to an end, and is replaceable so long as the 'frontier' condition is upheld. Bishop's position shares more of this problem of the undefinability of the contemporary zombie than it may first appear to. Because he maintains that the representation of the undead is a filmic realisation of collective anxieties, a sense of self derives from that collective reaction; it is never more than a fragment of the overarching communal drive. Moreover, the traumatic common-ground shared by the figurative zombie invasion and the horrific events Bishop describes does not necessitate a metaphorical link. Approximations to terrorism or anxieties originating from the Cold War carry weight in Bishop's statement but, as these connections are built on the stark unknowability of the other, they find their equivalents in everyday constraints of human perspective and are therefore underdetermined. In other words, there are many other forms of extreme violence and representations of political or humanitarian crises that could displace the zombie trope's signification in this model. Just as Sugg's summation of the

apocalypse is founded on exchangeable zombies, Bishop's formulation of the zombie as a pliable allegory is undermined as it becomes centred on violence and the unknowability of the other, something important, but not exclusive, to the zombie narrative. Once again, the difficulty of defining the modern zombie comes from its metaphorical fecundity. But this cannot be accepted as its defining trait because it puts forward the modern zombie as a metaphor that lacks the precision to map out the specific events that it supposedly signifies.

Stacey Abbott puts forward a different take on *The Walking Dead*, specifically how the zombie narrative can exist over a long period of time, how a zombie apocalypse slowly unfolds (2016: 113). It is precisely this observation that qualifies the selection of *The Walking Dead* as the subject of study for this thesis' penultimate case study that aims to examine the legacy of self-sacrifice of an extended period of narrative time. Abbott goes on to challenge Bishop's allegorical approach to the zombie trope and expand on Sugg's analysis of 'masculine self-agency'. She posits that a variety of narrative strands in *The Walking Dead* allow 'for a complex use of the zombie not as allegory but provocateur, confronting the audience with heart-breaking, thought-provoking and often shocking developments that raise questions about what it means to be male, female, child, adult, animal, human, barbaric and civilised' (Abbott 2016: 118). Following this logic, the zombie shapes representations of humanity because of what it forces them to do, what it pressures them to be. Abbot explores the development of Carol's character arc, observing how she defies norms of gender and domesticity in a way that highlights 'the performativity of all identity and demonstrates the way in which the serialised apocalyptic narrative facilitates an analysis and critique of social norms' (Abbott 2016: 118). Carol is lauded as a character who 'becomes more and more pragmatic about the need for survival' (Abbott 2016: 117). These significant ideas about the need to survive and character development will be explored in more detail in chapter 6.

The representation of subjectivity and what it means to be in control of one's life experience and decisions is also essential to the thorough review of existing literature on the zombie trope. Bishop continues to observe that zombies outline a 'prevailing cultural unease surrounding violent death and the loss of autonomous subjectivity' (2009: 1). So whilst questions of autonomy and subjectivity nuance the discussion that concerns the key characteristic of the modern zombie, the implicit issues pertaining to the self as a derivative of collective social feeling and violence as an underdetermined metaphorical signifier still remain. There are two ways in which Bishop's pairing of 'violent death' and 'the loss of autonomous subjectivity' can be read: correlatively, that the incidence of horrific death is more likely to coincide with reduced autonomy, or causatively, that the occurrence of horrific death brings about diminished autonomous subjectivity. However, although both of these readings are important to identifying the defining characteristics of the modern zombie, they must first be challenged. Pre-Romero, Haitian iterations of the zombie provide this challenge as they isolate the loss of autonomous subjectivity, preferring the magnetic influence of a hypnotist zombie lord to the flesh-eating horde. To be able to correctly situate the social resonances of the contemporary zombie, the roots of its mythology must first be considered in relation to its contemporary characteristics; the historical versions of the zombie defines their modern counterparts because of what they are not. This is different to anchoring metaphoric value in past events (a method that has already been critiqued in this line of argument) as it relies on historical analysis that will tie past and present together, enriching both.

The pre-Romero zombie was a very different creature to the one that is more widely known and recognised today. Originating from the French colony of Sainte Domingue, later to become known as Haiti, the zombie was formerly synonymous with voodoo. The very etymology of the word

zombie is of African descent. Roger Luckhurst points out how word for the undead has been shaped to this day:

> the Possible African linguistic candidates for the origin of the word include *ndzumbi* ('corpse' in the Mitsogo language of Gabon), *Nzambi* ('spirit of a dead person' in the Kongo language of the Congo) and *zumbi* (a fetish or ghost in the Kikongo and Bonda languages). In the Caribbean, speculations on the origins of *zombi* include sources in Arawak (*zemi* means spirit) or even a Kreyol derivation from the French *les ombres*. (Luckhurst 2015: 44)

Indeed the reality of the Caribbean zombie was different too. As opposed to a swathe of roaming, infectious undead, the original cabalist version operated through a voodoo master, a leading hypnotist who mesmerised victims (mesmerised subjects were considered the zombies). This often led to 'rebellion[s] led by the maroon (fugitive slave) Makandral, rumoured to be a sorcerer who had poisoned French planters and exerted uncanny influence over his followers' (Luckhurst 2015: 44). This era of the zombiistic representations appears to isolate a loss of autonomous agency as its defining factor. But, with the prevalence of slavery in this socio-historical context, the correlation of death and lost autonomy cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, the causative reading of this correlation is inverted; in the early stages of the zombie's history, it is the loss of autonomy that leads to violent death. This notion is supported by two of the earliest zombie films: *White Zombie* (1932, Halperin) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943, Tourneur). Both films depict zombies, subject to the will of the zombie master or Sabreur (voodoo priest), carrying out instructions to kill or maim. This would seem to suggest that the influence of potential autonomy loss has waned with the evolution of the modern zombie, when in fact, the opposite is true because of the modern 'infection mechanism'.

Luckhurst mirrors Bishop's sentiment by charting the linguistic development of the zombie from African words for 'spirit' or 'ghost' to its contemporary use as a standard adjectival modifier. Words that have 'zombie' as a prefix, such as 'zombie corporations' or 'zombie governments', do so 'because they are marked by loss of agency, control or consciousness of their actual state of being: they are dead but they don't yet know it, living on as automata' (Luckhurst 2005: 8-9). Not only does this observation fittingly resonate with the contagious spread of the modern zombie in a linguistic parallel, but it also allows for Bishop's 'loss of autonomous subjectivity' to be nuanced through the question of states of being, or in other words, through self-awareness paradigms. This is how this thesis will go on to tie together zombie apocalypse narratives and self-sacrifice. It will also go on to demonstrate how certain aspects of the vocabulary of self-sacrifice represent symptoms of neoliberal social deformities.

2.2.1. The Anti-subject: The Undead come into Being through Absence

Because the zombie trope consists of binary structures, (start/end, life/death, us/them and so on) the self, as signified through this trope, must commit to this structure in order to be examined in more detail. Therefore, because the defining characteristic of the modern zombie is centred on the loss of autonomous subjectivity, a construct that ties this loss to its binary structure is required: the un-self, the zombie as definitively self-loss. This construction is reached through the analysis of Jeff May's proposition of apocalyptic 'blank space'. This refers to the particular kind of urban space that is disrupted into being during the zombie apocalypse. May holds that 'through the depiction of blank space, zombie films illustrate how difference and otherness play counter-hegemonic roles in the constitution of cities and bodies and roles that are integral to the bodies–cities interface' (2010: 286). Therefore, private and public space are depolarised, cancelling each other out, interior and exterior binaries are brought together through the destruction of walls and boundaries and, finally,

the us/them spatial binary is diffused as the zombies infect the living. From this last opposition, self/other can be derived and oriented towards both human and zombie subjects. Of the human other and the zombie other, only the zombie other can become zombie self upon the event of infection. What defines the zombie other is its capacity to become a zombie self, the self, 'un-selfed'. The victim who exists in the incubation period, doomed but not yet zombified constitutes the loss of self that the binary synthesis of blank space represents as a logical conclusion. It is helpful to consider this situation in conjunction with Julia Kristeva's writings on abjection. Such a middle ground that 'disturbs identity, system, order (Kristeva 1982: 4) is distinctly abject by Kristeva's reckoning. But, as an assault on the system, the dissociation of identity and whole-scale consumption of self, the event of infection constitutes self-abjection which, according to Kristeva is the subject experiencing 'that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being' (Kristeva 1982: 5). The zombie as an abjective representation of the loss of self should represent the most terrifying outburst of primal terror that the horror genre has to offer. Whether or not this is the case will become clear further into this chapter. For now, Craig Derksen and Darren Hick propose a helpful counter-point to the zombie as loss of selfhood reading.

> Whether you are 'locked in' the zombie, a passive observer without any control over the body, or whether you retain some, but not all of your memories and personality, it seems you have survived at least to *some* degree, and so *you* are being harmed. (Derksen and Hick 2011: 13)

Here, survival is divided into increments in a way that renders it meaningless and is incompatible with the fetishisation of survival as a means of pressurising contemporary societies. The cultural value of survival intensifies with the loss of self and so reconfigures the representation of the

modern zombie. That the consciousness may persist post-infection seems to suggest more, the suspension of self than its dissolution, which in turn suggests a fate that is rarely depicted overtly in zombie media, rendering it an immensely disturbing prospect that cannot be proven or disproven in this discourse. Could this be how the zombie becomes the most terrifying contribution to modern horror?

To answer this question, fear as a subjective experience must be examined in more detail. Derksen and Hick follow Gordon (1980: 561) and Davis (1987: 289) in identifying an aversion component and an uncertainty component to fear (2011: 12). The aversion component is realised psychologically through self-preservative drives and the need to avoid harm, whilst the uncertainty component is the anxious question of whether or not said harm will, or will not, need to be avoided. Their distinction between propositional fear and experiential fear (2011: 12) then misrecognizes the temporal structure of fear in the zombie film. Seeing experiential fear as anything other than a succession of harrowing propositions underestimates the propositional certainty of the need for self-preservation that returns and returns. This flips the uncertainty component on its head, as it finds certainty in the recurrence of the aversion component. By reading fear in this way, modern zombie narratives can be seen to support the connection Richard Wosner and David Boyns make between the zombie plague narrative and ‘what Beck (1992) has called the “risk society” of the late-20th century’ (2016: 633). The risk society is a global state of high alert in which situations of crisis have become the norm and displaced the previous order in which emergencies were once pronounced. Alongside this runs a state of ever-readiness that sees the same fear-based certainty of uncertainty complex proliferated on a global scale with preparation and self-preservation as the common denominator. By extension, the common opposition to this, is the figure of the mass zombie, the undead pandemic. Horn et al concur, suggesting that a ‘global zombie outbreak constitutes a hypothetical event in world politics that could likely lead to the collapse of civilization’ (2016: 187). If the risk society is the overstimulated, globalised consequence of fetishised self-preservation, the

zombie is its antithesis. This is a notion that Lauro and Embry support in the way that they reconcile the zombie as loss of self, or un-self and its crowding multiplicity.

> There is the primary fear of being devoured by a zombie, a threat posed mainly to the physical body, and the secondary fear that one will, in losing one's consciousness, become a part of the monstrous horde. Both of these fears reflect recognition of one's own mortality and ultimately reveal the primal fear of losing the "self"; however, in the figure of the zombie, the body and the mind are separated antinomies. The zombie is different from other monsters because the body is resurrected and retained: only consciousness is permanently lost. (Lauro and Embry 2008: 89).

Here, the zombie as a lack of self is presented as thoroughly compatible with its plague narrative and its ever-expanding droves. It is labelled the 'anti-subject' by the logic stated above which resonates for a number of reasons. First of all, consider the zombie horde simultaneously and mindlessly reaching for the human survivor. There is a uniformity to the radial grasping of hands that surrounds the survivor but there is another reason it is unnerving - what the hands do not point to: each other. The zombie as anti-subject comes into existence through absence; it is what the zombie is not oriented towards that gives away its defining characteristic. This can be understood through the concepts of metaphor and metonymy as described by Jacques Lacan, whose work will become a key critical framework as this chapter progresses.

> Metaphor's creative spark does not spring forth from the juxtaposition of two images, that is, of two equally actualized signifiers. It flashes between two signifiers, one of which has replaced the other by taking the other's place in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier

> remaining present by virtue of its (metonymic) connection to the rest of the chain. (Lacan 1966: 418)

It is the 'occulted signifier' that is the direction that the zombies do not reach towards and it is therefore metonymically indicating the human form that they once were. But there is more to it than that. Everything concrete about a zombie exists as a residue of their past life, threads delicately tacked to anything from their choice of clothes to how they met their demise. As it has been established, the zombie has considerable and multivalent (non-Lacanian) metaphorical value but such links are derivatives of the zombie as a loss of subjectivity, nuanced to a lack of self or the anti-subject. Therefore the defining characteristic of the modern zombie can be reconfigured through the Romero-zombie mantra effectively. 'They're us' becomes 'they were us' and the zombie takes on the role of anti-matter to humanity's notions of selfhood. The figure of the zombie is important to the argument of this thesis it represents the loss of self which chimes with the process of self-sacrifice because of how the self must be expended in order for the trope itself to become resonant. This relationship will be explored further in the following section.

2.2.2. The Zombie as Unknowable Other, or Unknowable Self?

As it has been established, the zombie is positioned as the antithesis of self-preservation, even if it is, as Derksen and Hick propose, imprisoned in that position. It is therefore the embodiment of what notions of fear seek to prevent and, by that logic, the most fear-inducing trope that can be represented. But this is not the case. For the purposes of this study, it is argued that the zombie does not resonate as the un-self, anti-subject or loss of self because of how a globalised, neoliberal society is structured, evaluated and maintained. In a reality where self-value is habitually gauged by the failure of others, the meaning of the zombie as a representation of self-lack (failure implied) is

distorted. It is therefore prevalent (Dresner 2011, Luckhurst 2015: 167) not because of its scare-value, metaphorical pliability, or capacity to encapsulate collective social anxieties, but because it represents a failure to survive as a deep-seated realisation of hierarchy that ties self-worth to comparative (competitive) iterations of negative self-value. The figure of the zombie is realised as a fantasy of failure, with the viewer placed at its pinnacle, the enduring and (sometimes only) heroic survivor. Therefore, the resultant fetishisation of survival revealed by how this fantasy privileges the position of the viewer gives way to the competitive drives that called for the failure of others in the first place. Self-worth is gauged negatively but also in a way that reinforces the gauging process and the figure of the zombie resonates with this model as it signifies self-loss.

This chapter will now investigate how the zombie as loss of self calls for the examination of self-sacrifice in zombie film and go on to ask questions of survival representation in a neoliberal setting. The review of the zombie as self-loss through the framework of the horror of the Real (Žižek 2006) following Lacan (1977), will be used to reveal that the study of self-sacrifice is demanded by the proposition of the zombie as self-lack. This approach reconciles the zombie in its countless droves and self-sacrifice in its desperate legacy in a kind of symbiosis. The positioning of the zombie and self-sacrifice in this way allows their resonances to coexist and amplify each other in reference to the context of modern zombie narratives. Slavoj Žižek describes Lacan's notion of the lamella, a formless, free-radical organ that embodies the Real order and, like the Real, favours insistence over existence. He describes the mythical lamella as an indestructible, immortal force through reference to the 'obscene immortality of the 'living dead'' because, 'after every annihilation, [they] reconstitute themselves and shamble on' (2006: 62). It is true that the undead are riddled with life. The zombie's excessive vitality is funnelled like a secretion through their decaying bodies; it is tumorous and overwhelming to the vessel that contains it. But still they go on, they insist. Žižek

likens this compulsion to the Freudian death drive that also paradoxically characterises ‘an uncanny excess of life’ (2006: 62) and underlies the compulsion to repeat, revisit or relive traumatic past experiences. This forms the basis of the earlier assertion that the zombie as loss of self is frequently revisited in texts to build a sense of self-worth in a neoliberal social hierarchy. The representation of zombies in a variety of media (Luckhurst 2015: 167) is as insistent as the need to vindicate self-worth in a neoliberal setting. Yet there is still a tension between the undead as excess life and the zombie as a loss of self. However, they are more compatible than it may first seem. Excess of life is uncanny because it goes beyond identity, it overwrites and overwhelms the self in its grim and mindless enthusiasm. Therefore, the regenerative, automatic reconstitution of the undead operates in spite of the self-lack, it mocks it and renders the loss of self all the more resounding; the repeated (insistent) reconstitution of the undead body also signifies a disintegration of individual identity and by extension a repeated negation of one’s sense of self.

Victor Pueyo builds a similar line of argument from Žižek’s development of the lamella as the horror of the real, putting emphasis on the invasive other ‘at the other side of that space or internal limit’ (2017: 142). The unknowable other is, therefore, an insistent pressurising force that resists signification and is realised through the depiction of monstrous creatures. Although there is a place for this line of argument it is also problematic. This is because it is reliant on self-preservative drives; without death anxiety the unknowability of the other is of little consequence because it does not matter if they are, or are not, a threat. Because there is no death anxiety in the unconscious, ‘the very phenomenon of 'consciousness' is grounded in our awareness of our mortality. (Žižek 1997: 113). The zombie is therefore opposed to such conscience through its immortality that obviates the need for self-preservation, it simultaneously demands and embodies self-lack, becoming the antithesis of selfhood but also the inverse operation to the preservation of self. It is for this reason

that literature on this subject posits the zombie as an object of the Real (Žižek 1997: 112), (Pueyo 2017: 142), (Fehimovic 2018: 163) with persistent drives that outlast death and further deaths as representative of self-lack. But there is more to it than this. It is not that zombies are located in the real order because of innate undead properties; rather, that such properties denote an imprint or contour of the lost self, a film negative that puts the zombie at the edge of signification in terms of how the loss of self can be indicated. It becomes that edge and the loss of self must be extrapolated from its outline. An example of this can be seen as Dunja Fehimovic describes a scene from *Juan de Los Muertos* (2012, Brugués) in which the 'group [can] only establish what the zombie is not' (2018: 162), it is realised by marking out negative impressions, by deducing and reducing its outline to a shadow cast in the symbolic. Fehimovic notes that 'the zombies retain recognisable elements of the people they used to be' (2018: 162) and, in doing so, exhibit a convincing line of argument for the zombie as loss of self. It is that residue of a past life, that trace of humanity alongside a vegetive gaze, not knowing what it has forgotten, that epitomises the loss of self. The misrecognition of the lost (zombie) self by others in the film ultimately puts their lives in danger and challenges other self-preservative drives. The clothes, the marks, the (remaining) facial features, the heirlooms, the things that defined the person before they were not one are all points of ambiguity that signify past decisions or experiences that have no bearing on the zombified present state. Therefore, the zombie as self-lack is put forward as an indication of a particular social deformation that generates a sense of self-worth through the failure of others whereby the reiteration of the zombie trope is a visceral realisation of the need to satisfy this compulsion. So the next section of this chapter will analyse the logical next step to this rule, self-sacrifice.

2.3. Self-sacrifice: Its Representation, Precipitations and Legacy

If the zombie actualises realisations of widespread self-loss metaphors that are used to negatively gauge self-value and reinforce a competitive social hierarchy in a neoliberal setting, self-sacrifice can also be said to follow this trend, the main difference being that there is both an indexical relationship and a causal relationship between self-sacrifice and the measurement of self-worth. This means that their relationship outlines a point of hypostasis that binds the pressures of the zombie apocalypse life-world to modern neoliberal life and how this comes about will be explained in more detail further into this chapter, as well as chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8. For now, the meaning of self-sacrifice will be explored in terms of the literature written on it and its textual representation. Following this, the question of altruism in self-sacrifice will be examined in its relation to self-identity and cross referenced to how self-sacrifice is represented. The need for further development in the literature that discusses representations of self-sacrifice will be outlined and the problem of Christianity will be replaced because of its incompatibility with the globalising thrust of the neoliberal critical framework. Self-sacrifice will then be explored through literature that depicts it as a transactional and functional process and this will be positioned as a workable approach to the sacrificial act. This will then be applied to representations of self-sacrifice which will constitute the remainder of this study. The final section will follow the Lacanian conception of the mirror phase that will be used to call for an analysis and definition of neoliberalism because the theory supposes that from the very moment an (un)cohesive self-model is understood, it is always being driven forward through the understanding of a point of insufficiency in relativity to others.

There is a great deal of scholarly interest in self-sacrifice, particularly from philosophical and theological perspectives, that struggles with the question of altruism. The difficulty of the altruistic agent being that the realisation of altruism through selfless actions can paradoxically fulfil self-interest and the title of altruist is negated in its assignment. Altruism is therefore only possible to

certain degrees. This predicament is outlined in Chris Heathwood's definition of self-sacrifice which makes for a useful starting point.

> For an act to count as an act of self-sacrifice, it would seem that it must be (i) voluntary, (ii) informed, and (iii) not in the agent's best interest. But, the argument claims, if (i) and (ii) are satisfied, (iii) cannot be, given standard desire-fulfilment theories of welfare. (Heathwood 2016: 143)

The tension between points (i), (ii) and (iii) devalue each of the singular points in the collective definition. Because if the inverse was true and points (i) and (ii) were untrue (iii) would be satisfied. By the same token, for points (i) and (iii) to be true, (ii) is usually untrue. A definition that is unable to align its conditions must be developed as it gets caught up in the difficult paradox of altruism and will tend to carry its stifling dissonances through to other texts it is applied to. Therefore, a more elastic and porous understanding of the concept is required that will allow for structural and contextual fluidity in the process of identifying a modern cultural resonance in self-sacrifice. Other literature echoes the cynicism present in Heathwood's rigid, but well-founded definition of self-sacrifice. Huebner and Hauser introduce the variable of expectation into the discussion of the self-sacrificial act recognising that 'soldiers who engage in such acts [as self-sacrifice] are seen as heroes who have expressed courage and altruism beyond what could ever be expected of a person' (2011: 1). Here, expectation drives the sacrifice to transcend normative realisations of duty in a military context but they also claim that these heroic acts happen 'more often than one might expect' (2011: 1). This raises the question of obligation; to what extent has the transcendence of self-sacrifice crystallised into a repeated or insistent desire to go 'above and beyond'? Does the realisation of self-sacrifice in itself call for further self-sacrificial endeavours? If self-sacrifice is

normalised, how does that change its meaning? And what does it mean for those directly and indirectly involved with the process? The assimilation of obligation and self-sacrifice is challenged by Jean Hampton who contends that 'not all self-sacrifice is worthy of our respect or moral commendation, and not all such sacrifice really benefits those at whom it is aimed' (1993: 135). If there are contrasting messages as to the obligations of self-sacrifice then these points of contradiction have to be carried through to the act's social significance. Considering self-sacrifice in terms of its legacy provides context to the heroic/problematic dilemma of how self-sacrifice resonates socially. Hampton's skepticism regarding the outcome of self-sacrifice, as well as a possible divergence from its intention, comes partly from taking a step away from Huebner and Hauser's military setting and partly from an understanding of how self-sacrifice is active in terms of its lasting legacy. Once the intention of the sacrifice translates into its legacy, only traces of the intention remain and they do so through the people the sacrifice was intended to help. Hampton's example sheds light on this idea as she outlines that '"selfless" people […] are in danger of losing the self they ought to be developing, and as a result, may be indirectly harming the very people for whom they care' (Hampton 1993: 135). Here, the intention of the selfless individual generates the opposite legacy to the initial intent; yet at the same time the initial selflessness could be seen as an example and therefore an obligation for the others to do the same. It is by no means an outright normalisation of self-sacrifice, that would take away its influence; rather, a social microcosm would only need a single transcendent suggestion of the act to perforate layers of expectation and cause acts of similar gravitas to follow suit. There is a certain pressure that comes from this process that is part of the obligational aspect of the sacrifice but also from the paradox that sees self-sacrifice (to any degree) become more normative, and thus more expected, as it is repeated. This can be seen where representations of the self-sacrifice strive toward a given goal that is inherited by the characters after the sacrifice saves and/or mobilises them. There is a growing pressure that the

ultimate goal must be achieved because the sacrifice is seen as selfless, but also as a debt that must be repaid.

2.3.1. Representations of Self-sacrifice

Literature on representations of self-sacrifice is more scarce than it is in philosophy; this is where this study finds its originality and begins to break new ground in so much as it offers a full-length examination of self-sacrifice in zombie narratives. Moreover, the neoliberal framework around which this study finds the various meanings of self-sacrifice in zombie narratives is an alternative way to explore self-sacrifice. This also makes the case for this study's originality given that many other examples of self-sacrifice follow the influence of Christianity into analysis that looks for martyrdom resemblances. Christine Hoff Kraemer examines self-sacrifice in *Princess Mononoke* (1997, Miyazaki) noting that it 'is easy to see how Ashitaka's behavior in *Princess Mononoke* can be described as that of a saintly or Christ-like figure […] and in the end demonstrates his willingness to lay down his life to end the killing' (2004: 12). Although Ashitaka's intentions are noble enough, the sacrifice is positioned within a religious framework that does little to further enrich its meaning, the redemptive aspect of the sacrifice is merely reminiscent of a previous sacrifice which lends credence to the notion that the transcendent self-sacrifice works as an example from which more sacrifices can arise. Furthermore, the film is set in Japan during the late *Muromachi* period with the culture, beliefs and folklore appropriate to that setting. Likening Ashitaka to Christ seems to be an unnecessary westernisation of the culture of the film which is both predictably Christian but also an example of the globalising action neoliberalism encourages that can serve as a framework to enrich the study of how self-sacrifice is represented. This study will therefore reject the religious reading of self-sacrifice in favour of a neoliberal framework. It may seem strange to deny the (*sacra*) sacred etymological origin of the word 'sacrifice' but this is a

necessary tactic for a number of reasons. Firstly, the secular approach to self-sacrifice allows for more previously unfounded conclusions on the subject to be made and, secondly, the variety of cultures in which self-sacrifice appears would render readings that draw from a single religion a disservice the the tapestry of cultural meanings at play. Lastly, the deformities of neoliberalism have global influence; they quantify individual performance. The pressures that come with this process have adverse effects on mental health and social mobility in a variety of cultures.

To take another example of literature that examines representations of self-sacrifice in film studies, Camil Ungureanu examines the suicide of Majid (Maurice Bénichou) in *Caché* (Haneke, 2005) and likens it to a self-sacrifice. Majid is an Algerian orphan who is taken into the upper-middle class Laurent family. The film's narrative follows Georges Laurent, the son of the household, now an adult as he explores his personal guilt for his own role in exiling Majid from the family. Ungureanu also notes that 'Majid's suicide cannot be inscribed in a sacral story of salvation' (2014: 58), echoing the sentiment that not all self-sacrifices have to be examined by sacred frameworks. Although questions can be asked of where the line between suicide and self-sacrifice can be drawn, Majid's self-destruction can, either way, be understood as 'an interruption of a structural relation of injustice and as a call for recognition when communication fails […]' (Ungureanu 2014: 58). Although the grouping of suicide and self-sacrifice appears to overlook some differences of intention, Ungureanu sees both as a way of disrupting dominant social orders. This means that the legacy (and therefore the emblematic significance) of the suicide/sacrifice justifies the blurred lines of this pairing. Ungureanu's position also recognises how representations of self-sacrifice in films can be understood as transactional, functional fantasies that gauge the self-worth of individuals in negative terms. Majid's suicide is a failure to survive that is demanded by failing social systems that push Majid, once a boy orphaned by the 1961 River Seine massacre, to the point that he feels there

is nothing left to live for. Ungureanu specifies the significance of the characters in the suicide accordingly:

> Georges, who stands for the French community, may be seen as representing the *hegemon* or the System; and Majid, whose self-inflicted violence is meant to frighten and shock his "brother," may be regarded as personifying the terrorist. (Ungureanu 2014: 57)

Following Baudrillard's notion of 'new terrorism' (2002: 102) Ungureanu likens self-sacrifice to the mutually destructive 'counter-gift of terrorism' that exchanges systematic hegemony for social disruption and recoils against the established order. There are obvious problems with Baudrillard's position that Ungureanu rightly points out, yet the alignment of representations of self-sacrifice and this idea of exchange sets up the neoliberal framework as a way of analysing a transactional filmic self-sacrifice.

Douglas Portmore echoes this sentiment of self-sacrifice as an exchange. His work clearly supports the notion that self-sacrifice can exist incrementally and is not an ultimatum as in many apocalypse, disaster and zombie films. However the theories put forward are interesting in terms of their implication and subtext; the rhetoric sounds meritocratic to say the least. Portmore posits 'that the greater the amount of self-sacrifice that goes into achieving a goal, the more its achievement contributes to one's welfare.' (2007: 13). With the alternative to this view being the idea 'that one's self-sacrifices can be redeemed by events that do not constitute an achievement. (Portmore 2007: 13). The first position is labeled as the sacrifice principle and the attainment-centric word choices do nothing to conceal the outwardly neoliberal assumption that underlies it: that is, that achievement necessarily benefits wellbeing. Not only is this statement flawed, but how it is flawed

reveals an overemphasis on achievement that serves the neoliberal narrative of social obedience and efficiency well, the second view, the Not-For-Nought View, of self-sacrifice may counteract the first but seems like something of a revelation, as if it comes as a surprise that something that is not an achievement could possibly contribute to someone's well-being. There is an indication of the primacy of achievement in the residue of its negation, in saying that even self-sacrifices that do not achieve a goal could be worthwhile, a kind of neoliberal achievement fetishism comes to the fore. But, perhaps most importantly, there is a distinct expectation of exchange which goes hand in hand with any underpinning neoliberal assumptions. This definition underlines the idea that self-sacrifice expects recompense in the guise of achievement or consolation in the form of something less important (that could quite possibly masquerade as equivalent). Where these definitions are crucially accurate is in their capacity to emphasise the transactional nature of self-sacrifice and how an individual's expectations could tie into this in a neoliberal context. But if the influence of contemporary Christianity is glossed over, many early examples of tribal sacrifice, self, human and animal, were concerned with transaction rather than redemption (even if these two ideas are very much the same thing to neoliberalism). René Girard recognises that this tendency arises in societies that lack lawful authority. Under such circumstances, sacrifice is substitutional and functions as an overflow for excess, or contagious violence that cannot be punished by law. Instead, the sacrifice is a substitute for retaliation and serves to dissipate mimetic violence ([1972] 2013: 39). In his words 'violence is not to be denied, but it can be diverted to another object, something it can sink its teeth into' ([1972] 2013: 4). Girard's conception of sacrifice is not as incremental as Portmore's but if it can be understood that way, then, it is in relation to increments of violence. So, if sacrificial violence can be explained in Girard's terms as mimetic, to what extent can represented self-sacrifices (as well as the violence it often entails in zombie narratives) be thought of as a product of mimesis? And how can self-sacrificial expectations and legacies be said to comply with a mimetic trend? Mimesis in its simplest terms can be understood as mimicry and by Girard's logic,

internalising the desire of the other. It is the idea that no one's desire is entirely their own and that true want is a product of the other's desire. The logical extrapolation of this is that all desires are second-hand and are therefore passed along a complex psychosocial chain of drives. This theory supports the idea of the self-sacrificial chain that will be explored in more detail further into this study. It also makes for a neat segue into Lacan's mirror phase, but before that, Girard recognises that mimetic violence engenders a forceful opposition to the mimetic rival that embodies the competition of the monstrous double. Girard continues: 'He strives to master it by means of a mimetic counter-violence and measures his own stature in proportion to his failure' (Girard [1972] 2013: 167). This comparative evaluation of self-worth fits with the trend of the zombie as a loss of self and self-sacrifice as a means of reaffirming the failure of individuals in a society in order to hierarchise it. If mimetic desire is the driving force behind the deformities of neoliberal cultural value, failure realises its hierarchical social structure.

2.3.2. The Lacanian Approach to Self-sacrifice

The Lacanian conception of the mirror phase is important to the study of self-sacrifice because it represents the very first moments that a person realises their sense of selfhood. Perhaps more importantly, the mirror stage undermines this conception by stating that selfhood purports a false sense of cohesion because much of how a person sees themselves is related to the cause of desire, or in other words, how other people see them as well as how their desires shape their own, something Lacan would later refer to as the '*objet petit a*'. If the conception of selfhood is an illusion, then how can the loss of self that comes with the representation of the zombies and the insistence of self-sacrifice that serves as a competitive denial fantasy resonate in a represented medium? If there is no self to begin with, how can self-loss realise a neoliberal meritocracy gauged by the failure of others? In the case of selfhood, as viewed through the mirror stage, it is an illusion that draws

attention to the void behind it; the self is a competitive construct designed to harbour and precipitate the individual's shortcomings that drive them forward. Self-cohesion looks to transgress past versions of itself because of a competitiveness that neoliberal society allows to flourish. This sentiment is accurately captured in Lacan's description of the mirror stage which is as follows:

> Indeed, this act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of a monkey, in eventually acquired control over the usefulness of the image, immediately gives rise in a child to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflective environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality duplicates – namely, the child's own body, and the persons and even things around him. (1949: 94)

This extract deals with the infant's first ever encounter with the idea that they are a distinct entity, they examine their own movement for the first time and encounter their own conception of what they are in the most concrete terms they have ever known. It is in this idea of fixity or concreteness of the self, that the alienating aspect of the mirror stage arises. The idea that there is one fixed notion of selfhood is false and this is something that the individual has to contend with for the rest of their lives. In the words of the extract, it is the lure of spatial identification that characterises one's assumption of a cohesive self-model that is actually fragmented to its core. Each stage of selfhood is described as a precipitation, miraculously solidified from its fluid surroundings and yet always to a point of insufficiency. Lacan uses the example of the infant that strives to stand tall to seem older, bigger and more like their parents (2006: 76). There is anticipation only because of a point of comparison. This is the comparative (competitive) armour that is unknowingly pulled on that comes to be alienating and rigid, catching the subject in an, at times comforting, but often

disconcerting facade that only stiffens with age. Again, it is telling that inadequacy housed in a rigid structure has resurfaced because it is fitting that the false cohesiveness of selfhood is derived and structured by a series of apparent failures. If this pattern can structure selfhood, it can, quite easily, generate social hierarchies in a pressurised environment precisely because these societies and hierarchies are made up of individuals selves.

Before this pressurised neoliberal environment can be explored in terms of its literature, it is now possible to put forward a definition of self-sacrifice that will inform the analysis of this study herein. Having examined literature the zombie as the loss of self, and self-sacrifice, a number of criteria and considerations, such as genre, analytical frameworks and contextual timeframes, have been made a priority in terms of what is important in self-sacrifice to this study. Any definitions of represented self-sacrifice must be more flexible than definitions of real-life self-sacrifice that get caught up in the paradox of altruism but, at the same time, more applicable to the neoliberal contextual framework than evangelical takes on self-sacrifice. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, self-sacrifice is composed of a character's death that will offer a means of escaping for other characters. This immediate utilitarian aspect is essential because it allows for the mediation of imminent zombie threats. Infection and volition are important considerations for this definition because they operate by an and/or logic. If an infected character is about to become a zombie and can provide an evasive escape plan, their final moments constitute an appropriate exchange for the lives of uninfected others. This transaction is emblematic of neoliberalism's sense of continual weighing up, of optimisation and streamlining that has become characteristic of modern neoliberalism. Although volition may seem like the most important facet of self-sacrifice, it is in fact less entwined with the neoliberal system when compared with self-sacrificial legacy as a cumulative pressure. Volition has a degree of significance to the classification of self-sacrifice but

mechanically it functions as an internalisation of self-responsibility. Self-sacrifice, inclusive of its legacies and iterations is an outward gauging of selfhood that has taken on resonance in a neoliberal cultural climate that is reliant on the evaluation of self-worth. Resultant socio-political power structures are reformed in the collective subconscious of zombie apocalypse narratives and that is specifically why this thesis finds so much meaning to unpick with the representation of self-sacrifice. Now these socio-political power structures can be explored in more detail.

2.4. Neoliberalism: A Theoretical Background on Socio-economic Competition

Many scholars and economists (Tomšič 2015, Mirowski 2013, Klein 2008) point to Adam Smith's notion of the invisible hand (1759: 99) as one of the defining precursors to the neoliberal movement. Smith's assertion supposed that supply and demand would fluctuate until an optimum value exchange was reached thus ensuring economic stability. This idea formed the basis of liberalism and supported a deregulation of government investment (as opposed to the socialist movement's advocation of government spending policy). Yet this was not to be confused with the so called *laissez faire* movement that came before in so much as liberalism, unlike *laissez faire*, was 'sufficiently strong to remove itself from the pressures of economic interests wishing to skew market rules in their favour' (Rougier in Brennetot 2015: 35). Neoliberalism was a revised (new) version of liberalism that was first coined at the Lippmann Colloquium (Mirowski 2013: 38) (Brennetot 2015: 30) by Alexander Rüstow in 1938. Here, a group of 26 intellectuals gathered to debate the approximation of the political movement to replace classical liberalism as the dominant narrative moving forward.

A key debate that has shaped much of twentieth century political economics divided the arguments put forward at the colloquium: Hayek's opposition to the Keynesian economic model. Indeed,

Friedrich Hayek was one of the key figures in the discussion who objected to the proposition of a liberal socialism which followed Keynes' support for governmental investment. John Maynard Keynes' optimism was apparent both in personality and economic theorisation. His views championed government investment as a catalyst for personal and private investment. This was seen as a safeguard against mercantile hoarding. Keynes recognised the 'chronic tendency throughout human history for the propensity to save to be stronger than the inducement to invest' (1949: 317). This led to a tendency towards financial monopoly which must be resisted. On the other side of this debate sits the pessimist to Keynes' optimism: Hayek feared that government intervention in the economy could lead to its manipulation for political and personal gain. According to Hayek, 'we can never prevent the abuse of power, if we are not prepared to limit power in a way which occasionally may also prevent its use for desirable purposes" (Hayek [1944] 2007: 236). Ultimately, his cynicism turned out to be well founded because the emergent neoliberalism favoured the deregulation of the state, as well as narratives to both prevent governmental misuse of the free market and encourage private investment in the economy: it transpired that one narrative was to be much more successful than the other.

There have been many attempts to define neoliberalism in both political and economic literature. Philip Mirowski locates the new brand of liberalism in relation to its predecessor, remarking that the term is both 'historically accurate' and 'descriptively acute' because 'most of the early liberals explicitly distanced themselves from what they considered to be the outmoded classical liberal doctrine of *laissez faire* (Mirowski 2011: 41). Nicholas Gane notes that early modes of neoliberalism strive to conserve policy that allows for political freedom and simultaneously heighten 'the powers of the free market and the importance of individual choice' (2014: 7). Whilst Gane's observations resonate ironically in the contemporary socio-economic climate, this is

something that will be explored particularly in chapters 7 and 8, it remains that neoliberalism began as a logical successor to the liberalism that came before it. Paul Verhaeghe's comparison of liberalism and twenty-first century neoliberalism shows how the values (quite literally) of the political movement have shifted and offers a searing critique of the process:

> Whereas liberalism reacts to the excesses of the welfare state, neoliberalism seeks to turn society into a welfare state for banks and multinationals, lest the unthinkable should happen and the presumed self-regulation of the free market fails. (Verhaeghe 2015: 114)

It is not until the 1980s that the first neoliberal 'experiments' take place. Until this point neoliberal formulations are purely theoretical and for that reason, definitions from after this epoch must take precedence. The first neoliberal policies were put into place by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, Ronald Reagan in the United States and Augusto Pinochet in Chile (Brennetot 2015: 30). At this point the practical application of neoliberal policy began to provide the social elevation it became infamous for. McChesney notes that 'neoliberalism is the defining political economic paradigm of our time' (1998: 7). He continues to contend that it 'refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximise their personal profit (1998: 7). So how could an economic-political movement conceived by twenty six intellectuals in Paris stray so far from its intention? How could the kind of exploitation and political misgiving that the movement sought to prevent become so ingrained in its very fibre? William Davies offers a definition that outlines the workings of neoliberalism in a way that coaxes out its points of tension and contradiction. He outlines 'its hostility to the ambiguity of political discourse' (Davies 2014: 4); neoliberalism is an attempt to demystify the agendas of self-serving politicians with cold, hard facts and numbers that provide no

recourse for argument. Even though statistics can be skewed to suit agendas, '[n]eoliberalism is the pursuit of the disenchantment of politics by economics' (Davies 2014: 4). In short, the quantification of all aspects of life drives the neoliberal conquest for truth. However, as Davies rightly recognises, because figures can be manipulated and unduly thrust onto industries in which they become stifling (the economisation of artistic industries for instance). '[E]fforts to replace politics with economics, judgement with measurement, confront a limit beyond which they themselves collapse' (Davies 2014: 8). This quantification is a direct result of the marketisation of politics; Hayek's concern for the manipulation of the free market saw the rise of quantification in business and politics as a way to make corporate intentions more transparent, when in fact, it made people easier to pit against one another. Arnaud Brennetot outlines how the favour shown to big business and multinational corporations marks a significant deviation from the early conceptions of neoliberalism (2015: 37). In doing so, he reveals that it is the symbiosis of modern neoliberalism and large corporations that defines the political movement in today's terms. This is something that Naomi Klein has honed in on and is vociferous in her criticism of what is to her 'corporatism':

> The corporatist system blurs the lines between government and business - Its main characteristics are huge transfers of public wealth to private hands, often accompanied by exploding debt, an ever-widening chasm between the dazzling rich and the disposable poor and an aggressive nationalism that justifies bottomless spending on security. (Klein 2008: 15)

Klein starts from the fusion of politics and the market, noting the blurred lines that define neoliberalism just as well as they do corporatism. And, yet both movements, separately, (many could make the case for corporatism as a strain of neoliberalism) also give rise to the accumulation

of wealth for the wealthy, the privatisation of the economy and a worsening pandemic of inequality. In the literature that scrutinises the inequality of the neoliberal paradigm, many intellectuals and political economists point to a model that sees a liberated generation rise to the top and seal the path behind them (Verhaeghe 2015, Klein 2008, Davies 2014) and this too has become something of a neoliberal motif. Klein claims that much of the policy that allowed the social elite to assume the higher strata of society and then proceed to stagnate operated as part of a tactic she calls the 'shock doctrine'. She holds that '[t]he history of the contemporary free market — better understood as the rise of corporatism — was written in shocks' (Klein 2008: 15). In other words, neoliberal policy that directly or, perhaps more deviously, indirectly benefits so-called self-made men languishing in the privileged echelons of the social hierarchy is put through parliament in calculated times of crisis or mass distraction so that people do not realise the need to object. Davies makes a similar observation in stating that 'the rhetoric of opportunity was used strategically to hide the strategies of a very small interest group' (2014: 36). Klein's shock doctrine reconciles the brashness with which this economic rationale that perpetuates inequality is put into place. However, unlike its political implementation, the rise of inequality has hardly gone unnoticed (Hacker & Pierson 2010). This is true to the extent that worrying social side-effects have begun to appear in both rich and poor social spheres and industries. British politicians were found to have been lying about their claimed expenses in 2009 on various occasions and journalists were caught phone hacking, activity that the authorities may well have been aware of (Davies 2014: 2). Moreover, an increase in mental health disorders, obesity, behavioural disorders and substance addiction operate as part of the wider trend of 'calculated self-interest and competitiveness tacitly constitutional principles' (Davies 2012: 2-3). Similarly during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, many citizens of the United States were struggling to get by and pay soaring medical bills while *Amazon* made an unprecedented profit. This is perhaps the most real indication of how the ruling classes would benefit from a pandemic in a contemporary neoliberal landscape. In other words, the incorporation of competition into a cultural

morality leads to a reinforcement of pre-existing hegemonies of self-interest that is only intensified in conditions of global scarcity as exhibited by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed Davies' examples show how the championing of self-interest can affect individuals and organisations of differing economic climates. This seems to make the case for the successful and super-rich as part of an obsessive compulsion to constantly define their self-worth, even if it means breaking the law, and the poor as they exhibit damaging symptoms of the violent shift away from a hierarchy that is gauged by failure. Noam Chomsky puts the problem of neoliberalism in simple yet piercing terms: '"Bad ideas" may not serve the expressed goals, but they typically turn out to be very *good* ideas for their principal architects' (1999: 26). Yet again, attention is brought to a system of double standards that seems to coexist with both sides of the inequality equation in the neoliberal movement, almost to the point of audacity. At this point the question is: how can the quantification of performance, experience, of existence, in the name of political transparency, be reconciled with pervasive inequality? Following Mirowski's line of argument 'that transnational development, promulgation and popularization of doctrines intended to mutate over time in reaction to intellectual criticism and external events' (2011: 50) is the objective of the neoliberal movement, the previously posed question can be elucidated. This is because the mutation and development of neoliberalism can be seen as a vehicle of an alternative moral register: competition.

2.4.1. Justifying Inequality

Competition is widely recognised as an important driving force of neoliberalism (Davies 2014, Verhaeghe 2014). It is set up as a system that rewards merit with opportunity. As William Davies puts it, the neoliberal outlook stems from a need 'to attract and reward the 'David Beckhams' of the global economy' (2014: X). This metaphor not only marks the intensity of the contemporary neoliberal boom at the turn of the twentieth century but also reveals the quantification fetish that

comes as a precursor to the normalisation of social competition. Sport is a fitting encapsulation of the coming together of wide-scale competitive streaks and the quantification of experience. Davies recognises the social resonance of the ‘relentless political and cultural celebration of sport, which were becoming tedious features of British public life at the time’ (2014: X). In many ways, the over-celebration of sport during this period can be seen as an idealisation of a quantified, competitive system that treats its members equally no matter what their status or social position, because, by this logic, the political economy of the time can hardly be described as sporting.

Paul Verhaeghe has a similar distrust of the over-quantification of industry and society alike. He puts forward how the Enron corporation was structured, in terms of the monitoring of employee results and the elimination of the weakest performers, as a testimony to its failure.

> Unfortunately, this is an illusion, and a dangerous one to boot, as the shocking example of the Enron approach to personal policy shows. In this social Darwinist model, the employee with the highest production figures gets all the bonuses, while the one with the lowest gets fired. Enron, an American multinational, introduced this practice at the end of the previous century, dubbing it the ‘Rank’ and ‘Yank appraisal system’. The individual performances of its staff members were continually monitored and contrasted. On the basis of the results, one fifth of its employees were sacked each year, but not before they had been publicly humiliated by having their name, photo, and failure posted on the company website. (Verhaeghe 2014: 122)

Verhaeghe’s example outlines that the auditing of an individual’s performance to an overbearing extent pressurises them into fabricating their numbers. This leads to a paradox of quantification,

whereby an excess reliance on figures and numerical values can cause the accuracy and meaning of these numbers to collapse in on themselves. The competitive desire to transgress one's actual performance was at the heart of the disintegration of the Enron corporation. Once this process is recognised as responsible for large-scale business and economic failures, that is when it can be understood as normative, something that underpins the assumptions of neoliberal society, regardless of whether individuals see themselves as neoliberal or not. The casualties of the neoliberal competitive outlook need to be accepted a few times at first before its values (both literal and figurative) start to weave it into the underlying assumptions of a society.

It is therefore proposed that the competitive drive of neoliberalism is both driven and facilitated by its need for quantification which was originally put forward as a means of removing 'ambiguity, [of] emptying politics of its misunderstandings and ethical controversies (Davies 2014: 8). However, as Davies rightly observes, '[t]he rendering of economy, state and society as explicit and as quantified as possible is an implicitly moral agenda, which makes certain presuppositions about how and what to value (2014: 8). This outlines the moral paradox that, on one hand, seeks to make political endeavours more transparent, but on the other hand, justifies inequality in modern society. Because any argument for competition as a driving force of society is also an ardent advocate of inequality that necessitates winners and/or losers, it positions competitiveness as a normative vehicle for inequality (Davies 2014: 37). This is how the previously explored financial and social inequalities are able to stand and be accepted so freely in neoliberal social conditions. As Verhaeghe duly noted, people in meritocratic organisations have started from different places; some may have a head-start, and some may not be so privileged (Verhaeghe 2014: 117-118). In many cases, these hierarchically constructed meritocracies preserve the illusion of merit and gloss over false starts and pre-existing inequalities; such antecedent discrepancy is justified so long as it has passed through

the competitive mechanism. By extension, this verifies the organisation of society competitively, generating a self-substantiating upward spiral that makes it no wonder at all that social stasis has become such a definitive characteristic of modern neoliberalism. Competition has replaced morality in neoliberal society. In other words, the winners/losers dichotomy has replaced the good/bad moral dichotomy of the neoliberal social narrative. This is made evident by Davies' assertion that neoliberal competition has become just as definitively normative as justice was for the Liberals all those years before (2014: 41). By this logic, it would make just as much sense to say that market-based competition holds just as much, if not more, influence over society than the judicial system itself. This is clearly a sign that neoliberalism has mutated beyond the scope of its conception and into a territory that allows it only to further engrain itself into the collective unconscious.

2.4.2. Linking Neoliberalism and Self-sacrifice

Verhaeghe points to an opposition between the individual and the organisation as another key characteristic of neoliberalism (2015: 5) and, as the characteristics of neoliberal society have been previously examined in terms of their literature, the focus will now shift onto the individual, the neoliberal self. This will then be used as a segue into a Lacanian analysis of selfhood in relation to competition in order to ask how competition shapes the formation of selfhood and how this can come to be represented in zombie narratives. The remainder of this chapter will explore literature that presents a way into the relationship between self-sacrifice and contemporary neoliberalism that will set up some of the fundamental discussions that will take place in the upcoming case studies.

Mirowski's notion of everyday neoliberalism serves as a way into seeing how quantification and competition affect an individual's notions of selfhood. The definition makes clear that selfhood is

not only fragmented, but also multifaceted whereby many different ways of seeing the self are condensed and pressurised into a false but cohesive whole unit.

> The fragmentation of the neoliberal self begins when the agent is brought face to face with the realization that she is not just an employee or student, but also simultaneously a product to be sold, a walking advertisement, a manager of her résumé, a biographer of her rationales, and an entrepreneur of her possibilities. She has to somehow manage to be subject, object and spectator. She is perforce *not* learning about who she really is, but rather provisionally buying the person she must soon become. She is all at once the business, the raw material, the product, the clientele and the customer of her own life. She is a jumble of assets to be invested, nurtured, managed and developed; but equally an offsetting inventory of liabilities to be pruned, outsourced, shorted, hedged against and minimized. She is both a headline star and enraptured audience of her own performance. (Mirowski 2011: 108)

This extract outlines how the predictive and retroactive processes of the Lacanian mirror stage can be made financial. Because the process of investing in oneself is both an assessment and prediction, one that can be measured and cross-compared with others, the investment takes on the same structure of both realising characteristics, achievements or a lack thereof in comparison to others. Once this investment is internalised into the subject's identity, as is being described in Mirowski's extract, the forward-facing pursuit of financial betterment is a recognition of present insufficiencies. This makes the investment both forward facing and retroactive which is exactly how Lacan formulates the damaging alienation of the mirror stage and how it must be navigated in adult life. Here, Mirowski demonstrates the absolute quantification of selfhood as something that can be 'invested', as future versions of the self that can coexist, be bought and therefore compared. It is

this comparative route that outlines the link to the mirror stage because it overtly acknowledges the myriad of different roles, perspectives and desires that define the self through and beyond its development phase. Even though the development of selfhood is perhaps the greatest example of something qualitative, something that can only be articulated through experience and differing permutations of sensation and perspective, it is still susceptible to neoliberal quantification. Once recognised as fragmented, the kaleidoscopic distribution of senses, roles, intuitions and desires (now quantified) coexist in an irreducible illusion of cohesive self. The fragments replace each other, overlap and stand in over differing courses of time, but, all the while, the individual subject believes this cacophony of changes to represent a fully-realised cohesive self. Quantifying these changes, as exhibited here in the neoliberal self, characterises this self-model in a flux of competitive oscillations, in which there is a constant weighing up, a prolonged process of selection and deselection based on distinctly neoliberal criteria. This is how identity can be quantified in terms of converging and diverging from different neoliberal ideals. At no point is this demonstrated more clearly than when Mirowski refers to the neoliberal self as ‘raw material’ or ‘a jumble of assets’ whereby the indistinctness of the unrefined self is set up as a foundation from which progress can be made. When examined more closely, what is being celebrated here is the key process of the mirror stage, the ‘drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation’ (Lacan 1949: 78). Any points of quantitative insufficiency are celebrated so long as they can be improved and increased through the realisation of anticipations that acknowledge the point of deficiency in the first place. It is this mechanism of the mirror stage that ties competition and selfhood together. In the mirror stage, the subject perceives their sense of self as one fixed cohesive unit, but this is an alienating misrecognition because the self is both constantly changing and fragmented. Any means of quantifying selfhood, investing in it, comparing it, manipulating it, represents a neoliberal iteration of selfhood and subscribes to the alienating illusion of fixed selfhood and leads to a further intensified competition. Because neoliberalism

champions competition as its moral framework and as a means of sweetening inequality, any society that tends formulate selfhood from a position of insufficiency would be susceptible to the authority of neoliberalism. This is perhaps why, in the face of the extreme inequality of the modern world, many people still accept it under the winners/loser narrative that many have never not known.

If competition has been an important factor from the early stages of mental development, is a competitive society a product of that and not neoliberalism? Can competition be seen as a precursor to or a symptom of neoliberalism? Does neoliberalism make identity competitive? The short answer is that neoliberalism uses the competitive structure of the subconscious to verify its (unjust) competitive drives. But there is some explaining to be done in reaching that conclusion. Mirowski recognises the 'neoliberal market society must be treated as a "natural" and inexorable state of mankind' (2011: 55). He therefore suggests that the competitive condition has been internalised and notes that it is easier for the public to understand that way. Davies puts forward the idea that neoliberalism 'depends precisely on constructing or imputing certain common institutional or psychological traits, as preconditions of the competitive process (2014: 37). However, Davies' statement should be inverted: the competitive projection that the subject is met with from the first encounter with selfhood (the mirror phase) are the preconditions that allow for the imputation of moral, institutional and/or psychological traits that facilitate the competitive pressurisation of the neoliberal narrative. By a similar line of argument, Tomšič posits that the structure of the unconscious is organised in the same way as global capitalism (inclusive of neoliberalism by shared values). He contends that 'the unconscious production of *jouissance* and the social production of value follow the same logic and display the same structural contradictions, tensions and deadlocks: […] the insatiable demand for production (Tomšič 2015: 49). This statement is founded on the

Lacanian basis that desire creates only more desire (Žižek 1997: 14), an argument that is necessarily compatible with production as a creator of more production and competition as an enforcer of more competition. This means that the competitive/comparative habit that unconsciously unfolds as part of the mirror stage enables and is susceptible to the competitive morals of neoliberalism. This habit is the part of human competitive nature that gauges the structure of society based on the failure of others because it is both comparative and defined by its characteristic insufficiency. Indeed the 'loser' to the 'winner' equation that has become prevalent in neoliberal moral authority is just as persuasive as the title of self-made man because self-conception is formed negatively no matter how high a person's self-esteem. A society structured in terms of the failure of others originates from the competitive influence of neoliberalism but also the point of retrospective insufficiency that the mirror stage isolates.

2.4.3. Reading Verhaeghe as a Connection between Self-sacrifice and Identity

Having established the relationship between competition as a preexisting human tendency and as the pressurising moral double standards of neoliberalism, the effect of competition must be tethered to the subject's sense of self and identity. Verhaeghe likens identity to 'a balance of tensions; we are torn between the urge to merge with and the urge to distance ourselves from the other (2014: 10). It is this movement from and away from other points of influence that was being described in the movements of fragmented self in the discussion of the neoliberal self. There is a sense that differing and likening to an external point of reference is what defines identity, it comes from a balancing of degrees of sameness that Verhaeghe expands on thusly:

> We become identical with them [the other], in a very literal sense. We correspond with the message that comes from the other. Identity and identification have the same etymology,

> deriving from *idem*, Latin for 'equal'. This contrasts with the second process — a desire to be separate, to be distant from the other, to resist and reject these messages. And this urge is accompanied by a fear that the other is treading too closely on our heels, perhaps even creeping under our skin and, as it were, taking us over. (Verhaeghe 2014: 11)

It is important to think of the above quote in relation to the first encounter with selfhood described in the mirror stage precisely because that sets the precedent that is carried through to maturity. The mirror stage is employed here partly because of its relation to the conception of an individual's selfhood, but also because of how it ties into, in film and television studies, multiple analyses of the monster as a reflection of social anxieties (Žižek 1997, Pueyo, 2017, Fehimovic 2018). Both the ideas of corresponding to and resisting the influence of the other act as a point of comparison; to be similar or different is inherently a means of gauging selfhood in terms of how different or how similar it is from another. This means that there is the potential to assess self-value in negative terms. If the first encounter with the self is from a point of insufficiency, the comparative frame of reference is to the people who are most likely to be closest to the infant at that point: its parents. The infant assumes upright posture in order to seem more like its parents which coincides with the desire to be similar, but as the child grows it seeks a greater degree of autonomy; the upright posture becomes running away as they seek to make their own way in the world, corresponding to the desire to be separate. If this is to become the basis on which all later forms of identity are formed from, it can be said that identity and competition (as well as self-conception) all come from a similar point of development and all continue to be entwined in the development of selfhood for life. By this logic identity can be considered competitive but it is also competitive because of how neoliberalism has come to frame it, a 'stand out from the rest' narrative. Therefore the remainder of this study will address the following questions: How is the competitive self represented in a neoliberal context?

How is the relation between competition as a derivative of the mirror stage and competition as a moral standard of neoliberalism represented in film and other media? How is the necessity of the failure of others depicted as part of a neoliberal system? How can self-sacrifice help answer these questions? How does the figure of the zombie relate to the iteration of competition put forward in this review? How do these questions characterise the link between neoliberalism and self-sacrifice? And is there a difference to what has been outlined in terms of theory? And ultimately, what can self-sacrifice in zombie apocalypse narratives represent in a neoliberal setting and how is it represented?

3. Methodology

Now that the existing literature on zombie narratives and representations of self-sacrifice has been explored, the methods this thesis will use to craft its argument can be detailed. This first section of the methodology will outline the background of this study, detailing the schools of thought that provide the basis of the thesis' argument. Moreover, this thesis unpicks the connection between the zombie trope in audiovisual media and sets up the growing influence of neoliberal values in a socio-political climate as its first point of inquiry. Self-sacrifice is an integral component of the argument because it can be put forward as a representative cross-section of zombie discourse that reveals symptoms of intensified neoliberal agendas. Furthermore, self-sacrifice in zombie discourse can be understood as a technical and stylistic point of commonality. One that both circumscribes a sample size and focuses on the findings of conducted analysis. It follows that the study of self-sacrifice is also a study of self-worth. With this in mind, there is a shift in emphasis to what the self is, how selfhood is valued and how neoliberal conditions value the self. Such a shift requires an investigation as to the nature of the self and subjectivity, but also an inquiry as to what representations of survival can stand for in filmic, episodic and interactive modes. The expansion to interactive and episodic texts is demanded by the incidence of zombie tropes in such a range of media.

Moreover, European and American scholarship regarding self-sacrifice is, in separation from film studies, predominantly centred on Christian and western frameworks. Academic texts that are interested in the representation of self-sacrifice in films are few, however they tend to refrain from removing the self-sacrifice from the '*sacra'* of its etymology. In some ways, this study is a process of reclaiming self-sacrifice from its Judaeo-Christian antecedents and applying it to a neoliberal climate in which the self is devalued at every available opportunity, in which ingrained notions of competition reinforce conceptions of self-insufficiency in both work and recreational time. It is for

this reason, that self-sacrifice is always in the name of survival. The question of what one survives for emerges in both social and filmic scenarios. This study holds this inquiry as one of its primary research questions. It is also concerned with: How does self-sacrifice in zombie discourse provide insight into the skewed values of modern neoliberalism? How does self-sacrifice in zombie texts outline the prevalence of social immobility and a solidified upper social strata that itself survives on the manipulation of social economic scarcity? How does the frequency of the zombie trope, along with self-sacrifice, encapsulate a society whose hierarchies have been fortified and continue to be reinforced by the repeated failure of others? Other research questions contribute to the scope of this thesis but it is the combination of examining zombie film and discourse in relation to neoliberal critiques, alongside the study of self-sacrifice and the meaning of represented survivalism that provide the originality of this research. They unpick a combination of schools of thought and make conclusions accordingly.

3.1. Theoretical Context for the Study of the Zombie Trope

The context of this thesis is, as was previously established, multi-stranded, drawing generic theory on the zombie trope as well as cultural and political theory. Self-sacrifice itself has been the subject of a handful of studies but does not appear as the subject of a long-form research project in the field of film or media studies. This is where this thesis is breaking new ground, making connections to self-sacrifice, something seen so often in films of a number of different genres, to cultural and political wider resonances that have not been the subject of prolonged research before.

It is with the trope of the zombie itself that much of the theoretical context for this study can be identified. Much of this scholarly attention finds metaphorical meaning in the representation of the zombie. Kyle William Bishop notes how the zombie can actualise a metaphor for traumatic historical events like the Vietnam War or the Cold War (2009: 1). And there are many examples of

this kind of reading that regards the zombie as a cultural code for another event in reality (Drezner 2011: 115, Sugg 2015: 793). Other interpretations see the zombie as definitively monstrous and therefore indicative of the collective anxieties of a society manifested in an absolute otherness. This logic is continuous with Fehimovic's line of argument, who follows Žižek (1997: 112), contending that the monster, inclusive of the zombie, is culturally resonant because it indicates a fear of otherness that is frequently the underlying current of racism and xenophobia (2018: 163). Again whilst this is an interesting and viable reading of the zombie in modern media, it is worth pointing out that, at its core, the self is as unknowable as the other. Even though that may seem counterintuitive, Lauro and Embry hold that the zombie is a manifestation of the primal fear of losing the self and that the self in a state of self-lack is what the zombie represents (2008: 89). This brings forth the question of what selfhood is and what it can represent, which is also a key question of self-sacrifice and one this study intends to elucidate. It also introduces an inquiry into identity and how identity is the middle ground between selfhood and society, linking this study to the political and cultural frameworks of neoliberalism to be explored later.

3.2. Hypothesis

This hypothesis holds that there are two main types of self-sacrifice: separation-based and decoy-based. This will be demonstrated later in this chapter by a survey of various different representations of self-sacrifice in the zombie apocalypse. The conclusion of this survey locates the final self-sacrifice in *Train* to *Busan* as a pertinent case study because it exhibits multiple characteristics of the separation-based rubric. Moreover, it can also be read as a survival and an emotional response. As a paradigm, the previously detailed self-sacrifice is analysed in terms of its relation to global neoliberal frameworks and the abjection of self. This puts forward self-sacrifice to be a probing inquiry into the values of neoliberal social structures and constitutes a paradigmatic way into exploring self-sacrifice in zombie discourse of different forms.

It is hypothesised that the contextual significance of represented self-sacrifice within zombie discourse is actualised in how selfhood is valued. It therefore fits that the paradigmatic self-sacrifice of *Train to Busan* progresses to a case study of *[REC]'s* subjective self-sacrifices. *[REC]* allows the case to be made for a camera/self that complicates the viewership's relation to the sacrificed self. It is also a paradigmatic example of decoy-based self-sacrifice because it strips away the element of spectacle usually associated with this category and allows an inquiry into self-value. It is therefore argued that both a sacrificed-self and a signified-self coexist within the subjective construct of self-sacrifice. Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage is employed because it outlines and explores the advent and subsequent formation of selfhood. Following this theoretical framework, each construct of selfhood in *[REC]* is projected from a position of insufficiency. This leads to a signifying chain of self-sacrifices in which each sacrifice is an attempt to offset the insufficiency constituted by the last. From this, a self-sacrificial legacy is revealed that equates to the engrained pressure to survive and crystallises the metonymic *mise en abyme* of self-sacrifices. The real order, or in other words the underlying reality, that underpins this *mise en abyme* can be recognised as the replication of the individualism that is enforced by constructed social competition. It is argued that this underlying reality in *[REC]* is implicated by the opposition of the individual and state authority demonstrating an ingrained deformity of the neoliberal system that quashes social mobility and only further cements the position of the dominant classes.

The resonance of the signifying chain must be assessed differently in self-sacrifice in episodic zombie discourse. As demonstrated by Shane's 'self'-sacrifice in *The Walking Dead*, a change to episodic structure correlates to an alternate structure of self-sacrificial legacy, moving from the signifying chain to a mutable flow of modalities and casualties that circulate around the desire to survive. The desire to survive provides the hypostasis that ties together each iteration of the

consequences of Shane's 'self'-sacrifice. It is put forward that the return to the desire to survive is a further reinstatement of the winners/loser binary that neoliberalism holds as its defining momentum. Understanding episodic self-sacrifice in episodic zombie discourse also introduces the concept of a choice of non-choice. This is because the changeable legacy of self-sacrifice across episodic narratives perpetually comes back to putting characters in positions that limit their choice but maintain the desire to survive.

The examination of the illusion of choice introduces the need to study interactive self-sacrifice. It is hypothesised that the illusion of choice is irrevocably present to certain degrees in interactive, ludic and ergodic texts. The resultant cycles of control (and therefore failure/death) within *Dying Light* and *The Last of Us* reveal a version of interactive self-sacrifice that is as devoid of volition as a prerequisite as each of the previously examined self-sacrifice case studies. Cycles of failure/death open virtual failure to the possibility of an incremental asynchronous, non-sequential self-sacrifice, one that advocates an incremental learning process and a hopeful, gradual self-betterment. It is in its digression from iterations of neoliberal failure that virtual, incremental, asynchronous self-sacrifice outlines its contextual significance. This is because it will be argued that neoliberal constructions of failure serve the function of further entrenching systematic social competition which upholds social hierarchies that are already founded on the exploitation and subjugation of minorities and those of lesser social influence.

3.3. Critiques of Neoliberalism as Framework

This study follows critiques of neoliberalism as its primary framework. Drawing from the background research carried out in the literature review of this thesis, definitions and issues of neoliberalism will be put forward from the critical voices of Paul Verhaeghe and William Davies, among others. It is notable that both critiques come from the backgrounds of psychology and

political economics respectively and therefore their relation to audiovisual and interactive ergodic media contributes an originality to this study. Furthermore, Jesper Juul's take on the relationship between virtual failure and modern neoliberalism is integral to the final case study of this thesis.

This critical framework was chosen because the recurring tradeoff of self-value that is irrevocably present in self-sacrifice shares noticeable parallels with the assessment of self-value in a neoliberal climate. Social competition and survival pressures are present in zombie discourse to a considerably greater degree but they exist as a fantasy of the real world that even the apocalypse cannot purge from the collective subconscious.

Verhaeghe contends that neoliberalism is founded on the quantification of the experience of quality. Here, quality does not reductively mean something good; rather it means the quantification of something that should remain unquantified. Because quantity can be recorded, documented and audited, it is preferable to many neoliberal companies, corporations and agendas; it presents a way of optimising profits and minimising waste. It makes performance comparable and evaluation inescapable which leads to social competition and internalised self-pressurisation. In other words, it is the quantification of something that by definition loses its essence when quantified. The internalisation of self-evaluation is also the internalisation of social competition and the pressures it brings with it. This has become normative to the point that it is recreated in imaginations of the zombie apocalypse as indicated by the self-evaluation mechanisms of self-sacrifice. This has equally damaging and problematic side-effects in both professional and recreational spheres. It eventually leads to the opposition of the individual and the organisation and ultimately ingrained social competition. There are other facets to Verhaeghe's argument but they will be elucidated and expanded upon further into this thesis.

Davies builds on this idea in a co-operational point of argument, recognising that competition has become a new dominant narrative and therefore incorporated into a social collective morality. This means that outdated notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are replaced by the neoliberal ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, an argument also reiterated by Verhaeghe. The result of this competition-based morality (explaining the notion of ingrained social competition) is, by the logic of Verhaeghe, that winners enable themselves into positions of further success and the losers enter a vicious cycle towards failure. Davies contends that social competition is then perpetuated by constructions of social competition that further restrict social mobility.

Juul contends that the repetition of virtual failure can be read as a gradual means of reclaiming failure. He explores why it is simultaneously imperative to game design but also one of the worst outcomes a player can experience. This paradox leads to a gradual and incremental learning process that is markedly different from neoliberal failure because the neoliberal variant marks the gradual erosion of social mobility.

3.4. Lacanian and Deleuzian Theoretical Frameworks

This study employs several theoretical frameworks to enhance analytical detail within the case studies. The findings from this analysis will then be used to tie textual observations to wider socio-political issues. To these ends, the contextual resonance of self-sacrifice can be decoded by identifying the value ascribed to representations of selfhood. In order to ascertain how that value is allocated, the advent of selfhood must be isolated. The Lacanian theoretical framework of the mirror stage is put forward as a cultural tool of self-reflection because it details the first processes of self-recognition and self-valuation therein. It represents a detailed study into the nature of selfhood and how the individual’s relation to the other affects personal self-esteem. When applied to filmic

representations of self-sacrifice, issues of hyper-competition, entrenched social hierarchies and social immobility are revealed to be increasingly problematic.

Lacan's formulation of the signifying chain generates meaning through flashes from link to link, or in other words, from signifier to signifier. This provides a suitable framework for the discussion of self-sacrificial legacy because legacy comes into being through absence in the same way as self-sacrifice does. Each signifier (self-sacrifice) is linked to the next through the imprint that it leaves behind. With regards to self-sacrifice, this imprint, or being as absence, can also be understood as the 'insufficiency' that Lacan noted as part of the mirror stage. It will be demonstrated that the succession of pressurised self-sacrificial legacy within films causally connects each sacrifice. The myriad of successive connections implies a *mise en abyme* of self-sacrifice beyond the temporal boundaries of the film. Each sacrifice is projected in opposition as a metaphor of competition and individualism.

This is complicated however with a transition to episodic (serial) forms of zombie discourse. The *mise en abyme* of the chain of self-sacrifices is meaningful because it projects its implied legacy beyond the film's temporal boundaries. When this is cannot happen the legacy of self-sacrifice is experienced differently. Because episodic zombie texts, much like the zombie itself, keep coming back, there are no temporal boundaries for the self-sacrificial legacy to project beyond. This collapses the Lacanian theoretical framework and calls for an alternative.

In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari propose a more pliable theoretical framework, one constructed around notions of flow. This stems from the notion that desire is productive and not, as argued by Lacan and other post-Freudian scholars, constituted by lack. Social reality is therefore the fluctuations of desire and identification passed around and

relayed in the subconscious. This allows for the self-sacrificial legacy to be defined differently, shifting from pressurised to mutable. Changeable conceptions of legacy in relation to self-sacrifice in episodic zombie discourse can provide insight into underlying socio-political issues because of the patterns of representation that emerge. It is contended that the fluctuating representations of self-sacrificial legacy can be anything from supply runs that the survivors are forced to take on, to changes in personality that affect the narrative, as long as they too circulate around the desire to survive. What this means is that even though the legacy of self-sacrifice can often be very different and drawn out over longer time periods, the desire to survive becomes a commonality that transcends the texts and points out a greater neoliberal deformity. It is argued that the desire to survive or survivalism is a frequently positioned motivation that often goes left unexamined in narrative analysis. It has a greater resonance in its propensity to encapsulate the winners/losers duality that has become indicative of neoliberal culture. Moreover, it actualises a choice of non-choice that is also the tool of neoliberal agendas and calls for further examination in the interactive/ ergodic zombie narratives.

The examination of ludic zombie discourse examines literature on what has been recognised in video games because theoretical frameworks that examine the nature of the illusion of choice stem from the field of mathematics and concern probability and the extent to which sequences of events can occur differently. Critical frameworks that are concerned with directly analysing zombie video games are preferable in both relevance and validity.

3.5. Applying the Methodology

The application of this methodology takes place through a series of case studies, combining comparative, audiovisual and theoretical analysis through close readings. There are a number of reasons for this and they are as follows. The representation of self-sacrifice itself rarely deviates

from the separation-based and decoy-based archetypes that are identified early in this thesis. Whether it is a cutscene from a video-game or the dramatic conclusion to a film, the self-sacrifice does not operate with any significant visual differences to speak of. The fascinating aspects of the representation of self-sacrifice in zombie discourse take place when the content of the self-sacrifice interacts differently within different generic forms, be they video or video game. This observation calls for a preliminary chapter that surveys a wide range of self-sacrifices, noting a negligible difference between a wide sample size of different selections, and providing the paradigmatic example for the following chapter. Many of the examples covered in the self-sacrifice survey are filmic because, as the genres change, the self-sacrifices still tend to look visually similar to the filmic self-sacrifice. There are exceptions to this rule, most notably the main self-sacrifice samples chosen for analysis in the final chapter, but they are significant in how they are different and therefore pertinent to the analysis of interactive self-sacrifice in video games. To ensure that each appraisal of self-sacrifice is both explored in comprehensive detail and also representative of other examples in their respective forms, a combination of close audiovisual analysis and theoretical explanation will be employed. This process will tie the close readings to socio-political critiques of neoliberalism that will increase in scope and richness as the thesis progresses.

The order of the case studies is dictated by how the limitations of each form relate to each other. For example, the enquiries that follow the separation-based paradigm, *Train to Busan* require a filmic representation of subjectivity to realise what the value of selfhood is. This is why the case study on the decoy-based paradigm, *[REC]*, follows it. The application of this methodology continues until the fourth and final case study in which the close analyses become comparative. This decision was made primarily because the final case study makes several explorations into the contextual meaning of the illusion of choice and it is imperative to represent different ways that player choice can be guided and limited. Moreover, the movement from episodic text to the video game text is a

considerable change because it introduces player agency. To analyse a single text in this section would prevent the examination of how a number of different approaches to the illusion of choice are incorporated into the game design. The use of comparative analysis here allows observations to be made pertaining to the illusion of choice that are both more nuanced and more relevant to the wider scope of the thesis.

This application allows self-sacrifice in zombie discourse to be analysed in as much significant detail as possible without revisiting similar analyses. It means that the study can be both representative of a wider reality within zombie discourse but simultaneously be more precise about it. This method of application also allows the thesis to be original to a greater degree because its momentum is always leading it to new aspects and characteristics of represented self-sacrifice.

3.6. An Audiovisual Justification for the Intermediality of Self-sacrifice

It is important that this study consults a range of media in its examination of self-sacrifice in zombie discourses. This is for a number of reasons, the most prominent of which is that the visual presentation of self-sacrifice is not significantly different across different media. For example, a self-sacrifice in a film such as *Pandemic* (2016, John Suits) closely resembles an early cutscene in the video game, *Dying Light* (2016). The most apparent difference here is that in the video game, the images are computer generated, in the film they are not. However, the element of interactivity that the video game provides asks further questions about the nature of ludic self-sacrifice which will be covered in more detail further into this study. For now, the audiovisual similarity of self-sacrifices in different media is to be understood as evidence that these self-sacrifices are a recurrent symptom. They repeat because they are the culmination of inescapable social values that are the result of a collective repression of self-value. They are second-hand sentiments that pass through narratives and resonate with people without them being aware of it or understanding where the

resonance comes from. This argument will be presented through a critique of modern neoliberalism and will be further evidenced by how self-sacrifice generates its own legacy. Self-sacrifice as the production of legacy is a key component of this thesis and another reason for its intermediality. Legacy is important because it is both an examination of what selfhood can mean but also an enquiry into how selfhood can be represented without the self. For these reasons it is an important way into studying self-sacrifice in zombie discourse, but also one that demands intermediality of the thesis. This is because self-sacrificial legacy can last over differing durations of narrative time. This is why the change to the study of self-sacrificial legacy over an episodic narrative is important as seen in the penultimate case study. Moreover, the analysis of self-sacrifice demands an enquiry into what constitutes selfhood. It is for this reason that a found-footage film such as *[REC],* that complicates its representation of selfhood in its self-sacrifices, is important to include. As will be seen in the second case study, the enquiry into the structure of selfhood and subjectivity elucidates the causal connection between self-sacrifices in the film. Finally, because self-sacrificial legacy is always related to survival, and therefore necessarily the limitation of ways to survive, it introduces the illusion of choice to the thesis. This is an idea echoed in many instances of self-sacrifices in various different media that normally position the sacrifice in a position where they have no choice. And how better to explore this concept than in a medium in which choice is a definitive characteristic? Video games offer the player a range of choices so long as it is on the terms programmed into the game. It is for this reason that the game text is some increment of an illusion of choice. However, this would be reductive because, as will be seen in the final case study, many games find their value in how they nuance degrees of the illusion of choice. How does this relate to self-sacrifice? It demands the enquiry as to whether or not an interactive ludic or ergodic version of self-sacrifice can be formulated, achieved or merely recognised. This is the fundamental inquiry of the final case study which fully justifies the intermediality of this thesis.

3.7. Outlining the Structure of the Thesis

The overall structure of this thesis is centred on how the chosen texts relate to each other as well as the conclusions that underpin such relations. For this reason it is important to begin with a survey of a range of different self-sacrifices because it not only indicates the frequency with which self-sacrifice is represented in zombie discourse but also roughly identifies two different categories the self-sacrifices can fall into. These two categories are: separation-based and decoy-based self-sacrifice. What is significant about this categorisation is that its boundaries are fluid and some of the self-sacrifices from different classifications are sometimes similar. Both of these categorisations will be expanded on in the following chapter. The paradigmatic separation-based example that is explored in the following section is Seok-woo's self-sacrifice in *Train to Busan*.

Seok-woo's self-sacrifice in *Train to Busan* is the first self-sacrifice case study of the thesis. *Train to Busan* does contain multiple self-sacrifices before the one selected for analysis but it is Seok-woo's act of heroism that is the sole focus of this chapter. This is because there are two different ways of reading the film's self-sacrifice. The analysis for this chapter is exclusively directed at a short portion of the film so that Seok-woo's self-sacrifice can be examined as comprehensively as possible. It will be in the following section that multiple self-sacrifices will be explored in terms of their thematic and causal interconnectivity. This chapter on *Train to Busan* will appraise how the two different readings of self-sacrifice can coexist in the chosen sequence and goes on to explore how its underlying attitudes can relate to a specifically South Korean version of neoliberalism. It then regards how value can be ascribed to the self and sets up the question of how the individual's relationship to selfhood can come to exist.

[REC] contributes the second case study of the thesis because it is the decoy-based paradigmatic self-sacrifice. It represents a shift towards subjectivity to a greater extent than any other films

apprasied so far. It is a found footage film and therefore introduces the notion of a camera/self which exists between the 'signified' self of the camera operator and the 'othered' selfhood of the characters in front of its lens. This complicates the representation of the self that constitutes the self-sacrifice. The relationship between self-sacrifices is also examined in this chapter as it contends that the pressurised legacy of self-sacrifice extends far beyond the temporal boundaries of the film and projects recursively, a self-sacrificial *mise en abyme*. This is recognised as a metaphor for individualism and social competition, as a perpetuator of socioeconomic inequality and the maintained immobilisation of social class. However, there are exceptions to this rule and not all self-sacrifices have filmic temporal boundaries to project beyond. It is for this reason that the following case study is centred on an episodic narrative that returns and returns.

Otis' 'self'-sacrifice in *The Walking Dead* is the central extract to be appraised in the penultimate case study of this thesis. Indeed, those familiar with *The Walking Dead* will know that it is Shane who sacrifices Otis so he can save himself. The chosen extract for analysis in this section is Shane regarding himself in the mirror as the events that took place earlier leading to Otis' 'self'-sacrifice are replayed. In a similar manner to the first case study on *Train to Busan*, this chapter is directed at a small extract that has seismic consequences for the rest of the series. Scholarship on episodic television texts frequently encounters the difficulty of extract selection from a long-form text that can be dozens of hours in duration. It is for this reason that only a short section of the series for analysis was selected. This is because the gravity of the scene in question is equally important to the argument that is being made regarding self-sacrifice. It is argued that the recurring expansion of temporal end-boundaries in serial texts means that the legacy of self-sacrifice is no longer a pressurised accumulation between two fixed points projecting outwardly; rather it is a mutable legacy that flows and redirects through and around the narrative. The sacrifice itself can lead to many different outcomes. The need to find shelter, supply runs or romantic interests all constitute

versions of self-sacrificial legacy, yet each of the different outcomes circulates around the desire to survive. This means that no matter what the self-sacrifice leads to causally, it must be related in some way to the desire to survive. The most obvious example of this is the legacy of Shane's sacrifice of Otis leading to Rick's complete change in ideological outlook, to one that is obsessed with survival. This conclusion begins to introduce the conception of the illusion of choice as a necessary component to both survivalism and neoliberalism. The ability to explore these notions and variations of the illusion of choice requires an interactive or ergodic element, thus justifying the following chapter as a case study on video games.

The final case study of this thesis makes a comparative analysis of *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light*. This chapter makes use of comparative analysis because the two games offer slightly different approaches to the presentational nuances of the illusion of choice. *The Last of Us* offers a more linear approach to the zombie apocalypse whereas *Dying Light* provides a seemingly free-form, open-world counterpart. This chapter examines what the illusion of choice can mean in video games and goes on to comment on correlative examples in the two chosen texts. An appraisal of the differences between neoliberal and virtual failure makes the case for a different kind of self-sacrifice, one that is at the same time more hopeful and equally more incremental. The case is made for an atemporal, non-sequential virtual self-sacrifice that accumulates with the failure of the player. Survival is fetishised differently in a medium that allows the player to continuously come back to life. It is a process of gradual and cognitive learning that reclaims notions of neoliberal failure as a means of progression. A player may choose to die to a certain boss-creature or threat in order to digest its move-set and use this knowledge to great effect in a later reincarnation of the player/ character. The conclusion of this case study positions virtual failure as part of a self-sacrifice that can be a liberating antithesis to the neoliberal variant. This is because neoliberal failure is a

reinforcement of preexisting socioeconomic hierarchies that are perpetuated by the success/failure duality that has become so prevalent to the neoliberal collection of values.

4. Survey

The depiction of self-sacrifice in zombie apocalypse discourse is frequent and widespread, appearing in: *Dawn of the Dead*, 2004, *Resident Evil: Extinction*, 2007, *I am Legend*, 2007, *The Horde (La Horde)*, 2009, *Rammbock: Berlin Undead*, 2010 *Extinction*, 2015, *Maggie*, 2015, *Pandemic*, 2016 and *Cargo*, 2017. It is a recurrent phenomenon that holds a richer subtext than has been previously attributed to it. Analytical readings will be made in subsequent chapters to make sense of this reiterative trope. This analysis will then be tied into theoretical, social and political frameworks that elucidate what self-sacrifice means. Self-sacrifice can be read, understood and depicted in many different ways. In representations of an apocalyptic social hierarchy that values competition as highly as it does survival, escaping the depictions of roving undead is not nearly as difficult as escaping the self-consuming pressurised drives of neoliberal values. The purpose of this chapter is to organise and categorise instances of self-sacrifice. Critical and theoretical frameworks that outline how self-sacrifices resonate in neoliberal conditions will then be applied to successive paradigmatic examples further into this study. If it is understood that self-sacrifices in different media do not display significant visual differences. However, as will become clear further into this thesis, the mechanics and timeframes of serial texts and video games have a significant effect on the operation of self-sacrificial legacies. This is what enables this thesis to examine case studies that are pertinent because of their form and, to draw conclusions about the trope of self-sacrifice in zombie discourse more generally. However, it is the case that filmic self-sacrifices demonstrate a higher degree of intra-media visual diversity within their bracket, which is evidenced by the higher frequency of films in this survey. It is also why this chapter outlines two means of categorising self-sacrifice. Such categorisations also eventually go on to provide the selection criteria for Seok-woo's self-sacrifice in the final scenes of *Train to Busan*. Moreover, the repetition of pressurised self-sacrifice in the zombie apocalypse scenario outlines a lack of situational choice or what will later be

identified as the illusion of choice. The development of the thesis this way demands the investigation of interactive and ergodic media, in particular zombie video games.

In this thesis' literature review, it has been established that the connection between the zombie trope and self-sacrifice is related to the contemporary pressures of neoliberal modernity. This connection designates the criteria that selects the examples of self-sacrifice that will be studied in this chapter and will ultimately lead to the selection of a paradigmatic self-sacrifice in zombie apocalypse discourse. This will structure the remainder of the thesis. Whilst not all zombie narratives exhibit clear-cut self sacrifice, there is a positive correlation between self-sacrifice and the zombie invasion that will become apparent in this chapter. Furthermore, the zombie as anti-subject or un-self is part of a wider tendency of coming into being through absence; in the same way that the zombie is defined by the person it used to be, self-sacrifice is realised through its legacy. Indeed, the finality of death is not horrifying and iconic in such narratives; rather it is un-death that signifies a lost legacy of selfhood that finds cultural resonance. In the majority of cases, the zombie is the self-sacrifice in a later stage; it is often the cause and product of heroic self-sacrifice. The frequency of self-sacrifice in the constructed worlds of zombie discourse positions zombies as impressions of socially perceived shortcomings, shambling spectres of the failure to do what it takes to survive. This kind of represented survivalist attitude is examined in greater in chapter 7. The chosen scenes of this survey will be grouped according to how they treat their respective self-sacrifices. Zombie texts that do not convey instances of self-sacrifice will not be consulted because of the importance attributed to the self-sacrifice/zombie connection in the literature review. It is indicative of the prevalence of self-sacrifice in zombie discourse that ruling out self-sacrifice deficient zombie films leaves more than enough for analysis.

There are many instances of self-sacrifice in zombie film and as such further boundaries for the scope of surveyed texts must be put in place. Because this thesis is concerned with the effects of contemporary neoliberalism, it fits that zombie texts of the 21st century should be the focus of this study. In line with the literature review, instances of self-sacrifice can be incremental and as such a flexible definition of self-sacrifice will be employed. By this logic, self-sacrifice values practicality above volition and aligns endemic pressures to survive with the pressurised hierarchies of neoliberal social conditions. For the purposes of this chapter, notions of practical value will provide a structure for the following theoretical, social and political analyses. This structure is chosen because the literature-derived definition champions both practicality and exchange value in terms of how they relate to modern neoliberalism. The types of self-sacrifice in zombie discourse that will be explored can be roughly divided into two main variants: the separation-based self-sacrifice and the decoy-based self-sacrifice. It must be noted that some self-sacrifices may share aspects of both categories and therefore the categorisation is not always going to be clear-cut. There may be exceptions but for the purpose of structuring the forthcoming comparison, separation and decoy motivated self-sacrifice categorisations will hold weight. This categorisation will be explored in detail through the theoretical examination of self-sacrifice in zombie media. The social analyses that follow will consider the self and other of self-sacrifice and by extension where the signification of self-sacrifice as a social ritual finds its resonance. This will then lead into a political discussion of self-sacrifice in zombie media, locating social structures in terms of political pressures and building the argument that representations of survivalism manifest as hypostases of neoliberal pressures that, like zombie hordes, are virtually inescapable. The final section of this chapter explores ludic media, specifically zombie shooter video games, and makes the case for an interactive self-sacrifice, examining how the notion of failure is constructed in the game-world. This defines the notion of survival not by its aspirations of longevity but by the lack of choice that it actualises. Depictions of self-sacrifice in video games can occur narratively via cutscenes and are therefore the same as filmic constructions

of the act albeit graphically animated. The final action of this chapter will be the proposition of a ludic, interactive self-sacrifice made by the player as a process of gradual self-enrichment.

4.1. An Introduction to the Classification of Self-sacrifice in Zombie Narratives

The examination of self-sacrifice in zombie film will begin with the outlining of two recognisable types of self-sacrifice: separation-based and decoy-based. Although there are examples within zombie discourse that blur the lines of this categorisation, their visual language is largely distinct and the way that the sacrifice operates narratively is different.

The final self-sacrifice scene in *Train to Busan* (2016, Yeon Sang-ho) will be the paradigmatic example of self-sacrifice for this study because it allows for an in-depth application of several different theoretical frameworks pertaining to self-sacrifice. This will be made clear in this chapter through passing reference to other self-sacrifice sequences that convey similar characteristics to the chosen paradigm. To commence the theoretical framework application of self-sacrifice, the difference between separation-based and decoy-based self-sacrifice should first be explained.

Both kinds of self-sacrifice offer safe passage to the rest of the group and yet how such safety is allocated differs in accordance to the separation and decoy-based self-sacrifice rubrics. On one hand, the decoy-based self-sacrifice is violent and determined by tactical manoeuvres; on the other hand, the separation-based self-sacrifice is more passive and punctuated by dialogue. By the same token, both sequences of self-sacrifice contain the structure of an exchange, be it of heartfelt words or bullets. This is why it is evident that both sacrificial acts are the staging of a transaction. The mutual involvement of a vehicle also likens the self-sacrifices to each other and serves as a reminder of the cultural and economical ruin that the characters have been left to survive in. Both

categories are usually concluded with a wide shot that emphasises the gravity of the decoy or separation they have made.

For example, in the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004, Snyder), two characters make self-sacrifices at the conclusion of the film. The first is performed by CJ (Micheal Kelly) and is clearly a decoy-based self-sacrifice and this is followed by Micheal's (Jake Weber) self-sacrifice that is recognisable as a separation-based self-sacrifice.

With CJ, the explosion of the bus he dies in can be seen in an extreme long shot, encompassing the entirety of its blast radius. Similarly, the long, slow-motion take depicting Micheal as he is stood at the edge of the port gradually zooms out as if to mimic the action of the survivors' boat drifting out to sea. Although the use of wide shots to emphasise the scope of the self-sacrifice outcome is a commonality, what the wide shots depict is clearly different. The decoy-based self-sacrifice can define its success in terms of the amount of zombies that it obstructs, distracts and obliterates. CJ's explosive last stand is gauged by the imprint it makes on innumerable zombie hordes, the spectacular dent made on the onrushing flow of undead limbs. In contrast, the separative self-sacrifice is more fearful of infectious spread than sheer numbers; it becomes personal and the zombie is dormant yet poised. The survivors of the group come into being through the absence of the dangerous infected individual which gives the separative self-sacrifice a contrasting sombre tone. Yet, the underlying irony is that both self-sacrificial tones are transactional, however explosive or melancholic they may seem. With the separative self-sacrifice, there is evidence of the bite that seems to bind the self-sacrificial decision to the physical fibre of the filmic world.

Now that the two main types of self-sacrifice have been explained, the paradigmatic self-sacrifice in *Train to Busan* can be explored but also justified as a paradigm. *Train to Busan* can be read as an

apotheosis of each of these characteristics as Seok-woo's (Gong Yoo) self-sacrifice at the conclusion of the film is a fully realised and richly constructed example of self-sacrifice. It is for this reason that, for the purposes of this study, this self-sacrifice will serve as the paradigm that will be used to connect the implications of self-sacrifice in apocalypse narratives to a damaging modern neoliberal social deformity.

The first self-sacrifice that constitutes the theoretical paradigm is separation-based. This is because the numerous layers of meaning, the tender farewells, the cutaways to a better time and the emotive closeups, add to the value a theoretical reading of the self-sacrificial act. In contrast, the layers represented in the decoy-based self-sacrifice, the explosions, struggles and tactical contingency plans, veil the social resonance of the represented self-sacrifice. When self-sacrifice is examined from a sociological point of view, decoy-based self-sacrifices that strip back visual elements of spectacle will be prioritised as is the case in *[REC]* (2006, Plaza, Balagueró). It is also important to note that the analysis of self-sacrifices in *[REC]* gives greater insights into self-value and subjectivity.

The justification for the use of Seok-woo's self-sacrifice as a paradigm in this study comes from how it includes elements from a great range of other separation-based self-sacrifices. *Dawn of the Dead* also incorporates the use of a vehicle into the self-sacrifice. Regardless of whether it is a boat or a train, the structure of the sacrifice is centred on being willingly left behind. The inclusion of a vehicle allows for escape and separation to occur simultaneously. This structures the self-sacrifice temporally so that the sacrifice is often on the cusp of turning which, in turn, facilitates a sentimental removal from the group. Representations of residual technology and machinery chart a descent into social ruin through their abandonment and eventual usefulness in the post-zombie-apocalyptic world. The visual association of vehicles, more readily seen in neoliberal urban settings

as means of supporting trade supply lines and urban infrastructure, are relocated into the imperative of survival. The reemergence of vehicles in narrative visuals recalls the everyday commute in ruin and channels the neoliberal compulsion for succinctness and productivity, converting such urgency into the apocalyptic need to escape and consequent survival pressures. This pattern is repeated in *Rammbock* (2010, Kren), *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007, Mulcahy) and *Extinction* (2015, Ángel Vivas) all of which make use of vehicles in different ways. This cements the use, positioning and situation of the vehicle within the theoretical framework of self-sacrifice.

Perhaps the most prominent visual feature of Seok-woo's sacrifice at the conclusion of *Train to Busan* is the use of cutaways to diversify its illustration of the self-sacrifice's melancholic resolution. Similar idyllic escapist cutaways can be seen in *Maggie* (2015, Henry Hobson). Seok-woo's self-sacrifice is positioned as heroic but unbearable to the extent that a degree of spatial transportation is exhibited in the editing as an anaesthetic. The frequency of transporting cutaways in different zombie discourse outlines this technique in its importance to the theoretical framework of self-sacrifice. In the case of *Train to Busan* and *Maggie* the time-frame of the self-sacrifice is limited; a sense of urgency is presented by the proximity of infection. Yet, at the same time, such urgency is further subdivided into excursions away from the present moment, to ruminations on the past or predictions of the future. As this theoretical framework will go on to demonstrate, this temporality will constitute one of the key characteristics of self-sacrifice and how it links to problematic neoliberal social values. Another resemblance between these two self-sacrifices can be seen in the way that a similar father/daughter dynamic is present. Seok-woo's self-sacrifice sequence cuts to an all-white space in which he cradles Soo-an as a newborn. His daughter's age marks this cutaway as a significant temporal deviation from the present self-sacrifice. The father-daughter reminiscence is inverted in the final self-sacrifice scene in *Maggie*. Wade (Arnold Schwarzenegger) is reminiscing as he looks through pictures of his daughter. This is the emotive

and reflective trend coming into effect again; like Seok-woo's anaesthetic revisitation of his first moments with his daughter, the pictures are temporal markers. These reflective cutaways signal a longing for a better time and place with the immediate situation becoming only as valuable their final living moments permit. This further outlines a temporal projection that is incorporated into the chronology of the self-sacrifice in order to concentrate it and prolong it. This isolates the sacrifice's precious final moments, which are imperative to the very existence of a narrative future. At the same time, these moments are elongated and condensed in a limbo that this thesis' framework will refer to as the temporal dialectic of self-sacrifice. This will be explored in more detail in the theoretical case study of *Train to Busan* in the subsequent chapter.

The final self-sacrifice in *Train to Busan* also shares similarities with *Rammbock* and *Cargo* (2017, Howling, Ramke) in how it looks to the future and disseminates a self-sacrificial legacy. *Cargo* demonstrates a similar preparatory feature whereby the zombie self is preemptively disarmed and used as a vehicle for the survivors. This makes for a divergent take on self-sacrifice, yet one that still fits into the structure of Seok-woo's self-sacrifice. *Rammbock* is comparable because the sequence in which Micheal (Micheal Fuith) outlines how to operate the camera-armed tricycle resembles the sequence in which Seok-woo teaches Seong-kyeong (Jung Yu-mi) how to operate the train in *Train to Busan*. It is this didactic function that outlines the sacrifice's realisation and recognition of their post-sacrificial legacy. However, the pre-sacrificial didactic approach also discloses the practical value of the act that is just as much as it is a transfer of survival pressure. In many ways, self-sacrifice is the exchange of futures; it is a way of constructing selfhood based on the impressions survivors will carve out of futurity. The deeper the imprint, the more pressure there is to survive. There is both a sacrificial legacy that extends beyond the moment of self-sacrifice through the surviving party and a projected sacrificial legacy that begins and ends with the sacrifices themselves. Both actual and projected legacies have different understandings of the value

of self-sacrifice and it is with these discrepancies that the meaning of the sacrifice can be calculated. The didactic function of the self-sacrifice in both *Train to Busan* and *Rammbock* can be used as an example of how these legacies can deviate from one another and relate to critiques of neoliberalism. Starting from the projected legacy, the sacrifice teaches the others the operation of the vehicle that will lead them to safety. This serves as an allocation of time with an inherent double function: the transfer of knowledge and the expenditure of final moments. Regardless of whether the didactic transfer is understood by its recipient, the process of an exchange is a means of pronouncing the sacrifice's imminent departure. In the upcoming analysis of Seok-woo's self-sacrifice in the next chapter, the ineffectiveness of informational transfer depicted in this way will be used to make the case for the fetishisation of survival and its resonance in neoliberal settings. To Seok-woo/Micheal, the teaching is a projection beyond their death to do even more to assist the other survivors. In reality, what is taught is already reasonably apparent and it is the act of further committing their dying breaths to the survivors that is the operative function in these kinds of self-sacrifices. The quantification of this precious and rapidly declining resource generates an intensified pressure for the survivors to survive. This logically progresses to the actual legacy of self-sacrifice that lives on with the survivors. Any self-sacrifices that are referenced posthumously in zombie media are attributed an imperative to progress in order to maintain the value of the past self-sacrifice (See *Train to Busan* 2016*, Extinction* 2015*, Pandemic* 2016). This results in a pressurised legacy that differs markedly from the sacrifice's initial projection. The disparity between these two understandings of self-sacrificial legacies obscures a symmetry between the represented self-sacrifice and its legacy. Here, the symmetrical structure of self-sacrifice means that it looks both forward and backward, it is another way of understanding the temporal dialectic of self-sacrifice. This means that self-sacrifice is formed in a temporal dialectic that draws both retrospectively and prospectively. Yet, that same structure is replicated in its pressurising legacy; the insistence on survival is generated futuristically by its very nature, and retrospectively by the residue of past

sacrifices. This idea will be further explored in the following section that illuminates the social resonances of self-sacrifice and emphasises how the symmetrical structure of self-sacrifice and the pressurising legacy that comes with it relates to the structuring of neoliberal society.

Therefore, it is clear that Seok-woo's self-sacrifice in *Train to Busan* channels a rich variety of sentiments and tendencies from other instances of self-sacrifice that justifies its selection as a paradigm for separation-based self-sacrifice. Moreover, its alignment of each of these self-sacrificial tropes means that they can each be analysed in terms of how they relate to the social pressures and stagnated hierarchies of neoliberalism. For these reasons, the following chapter will consist of close analysis of Seok-woo's self-sacrifice and how its depiction resonates in neoliberal social conditions.

4.2. *[REC]* as a Subjective Framework for Self-sacrifice

As it has been demonstrated thus far, decoy-based self-sacrifices often exhibit explosions, violence, spectacle and an attitude that befits going out in a blaze of glory. By streamlining the decoy-based self-sacrifices, cutting away the fiery blasts, pruning the violent outbursts and aligning the camera to a subjective representation of selfhood, a sense of exactly what is being sacrificed and for whom becomes clearer. The outcomes and consequences differ from the eventual answers but that will be explored during the course of this study. It is therefore proposed that *[REC]* will offer insight into the nature of decoy-based self-sacrifice due to how it comes closer to the subjective experience of selfhood and how it removes many of the spectacular elements of decoy-based self-sacrifice. *[REC]* complicates the position of selfhood and depicts decoys that favour pragmatism over spectacle. The underlying assumptions of these priorities will be unpicked in detail, in a later chapter that analyses *[REC]*.

The justification in line with the logic of this chapter is as follows: *[REC]* is selected as the paradigmatic decoy-based self-sacrifice because it does not share the explosions exhibited in the self-sacrifices of *Dawn of the Dead*, *Resident Evil: Extinction*, *Extinction*, *World War Z* (2013, Marc Forster) and *I am Legend* (2007, Francis Lawrence). Furthermore, it bypasses examples of gratuitous violence as seen in *La Horde* (2009, Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher) and *Pandemic* (2016, John Suits). Violence and gore are present but not revelled in, they are positioned as a means of outlining the nightmarish circumstances of the film without ever presenting the sense that such carnage is favourable. It is worth noting that the first person perspective of *Pandemic* does echo the filmic construction of *[REC]* but the former is an assemblage of numerous character perspectives and it repositions on cue to deliver a product that is closer to that of a 'third-person' approach to editing; in other words, *[REC]* is positioned closer to the subjectivity of self-sacrifice, it is more intimately linked to it and, therefore, more valid conclusions can be drawn from it. This is allowed by how the camera/self is presented in a state of suspension, held between documenting and surviving the self-sacrifice. In other words, the sacrifice is rarely shown in its entirety because, as will be seen in the chapter 6, there is a tension between the mutually exclusive documenting and escaping. This means that the danger that the self-sacrifice strives to avert would not be averted if those who the act was intended to save remained to record the self-sacrifice. This is why most of *[REC]*'s self-sacrifices are depicted elliptically. Moreover, as has been alluded to several times in this chapter, both categorisations of self-sacrifice rely on futuristic projection and historic reflection. With this in mind, the first-person point of view and proximal subjectivity of *[REC]* demands a Lacanian framework to generate meaningful conclusions about self-sacrifice in relation to neoliberal social orders. This is because much of what is articulated in the analysis of this chapter is inferred through the absence of things, pushes that take place on the camera operator and unseen objects that collide with its microphones. These events resonate with Lacan's formulation of metaphor because they come into being through absence; their presence is documented in terms of

what is not there. Moreover, the self-sacrifices in this case study come to form a signifying chain, with each only finding meaning through the next and this is imperative to the findings of this chapter. This theoretical framework will be consulted in reference to *[REC]* and will be used to generate meaningful deductions about competition, survival, neoliberalism and their social constructs.

Moreover, *[REC]* makes a contribution to this study because of how it treats selfhood. There is a selfhood signified by the camera and its operator that will be referred to as the camera/self and explored in more detail in the chapter focused on *[REC]*. This camera/self is different to the selfhood of self-sacrifices and so complicates how self-sacrifice can be depicted within the film. The camera/self links each of the self-sacrifices in the film and in doing so implies their legacy beyond the temporal boundaries of the film. The infinity of this projection is what actualises a kind of self-sacrificial *mise en abyme*. This is what is then explored in terms of its sociopolitical resonances towards the end of the aforementioned sixth chapter.

4.3. The Political Framework for Self-sacrifice in Episodic Form

Although they do not appear to have significant visual difference to their filmic counterparts, the frequency of self-sacrifice representations in episodic zombie narratives can be detailed. Even though it is not definitively a zombie narrative or the chosen case study for this section, in *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), the high fantasy genre makes a sudden movement towards zombie narrative tropes as soon as the undead from beyond the wall make an appearance. Hodor's (Kristian Nairn) holding of the door so that other characters can escape is not a one off dramatic self-sacrifice in the presence of the undead. Something similar happens when Uncle Benjen (Joseph Mawle) sacrifices himself to save Jon Snow (Kit Harrington) from an undead horde beyond the wall. Similarly, in *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015 - present) Ed (Raphael Sbarge) sacrifices himself to his own

'augmented dead' as he urges Alicia (Alycia Debnam-Carey) to escape. However, this thesis looks to a less typical example of self-sacrifice to explore Deleuze and Guatarri's notion of flow and schizophrenia. *The Walking Dead* is the chosen text for examination under political framework. It is the selection of Otis' 'self' sacrifice, or Shane's sacrifice of Otis, that allows the legacies and pressures of self-sacrifice to be examined in more detail. The political frameworks of self-sacrifice will be analysed in terms of self-sacrifice in episodic form. This is because episodic form alters the timeframes of self-sacrifice in such a way that it makes more apparent how the intentions and organisation of a society are set up to keep the ruling class in a position of influence. It will be contended that the need to survive in film becomes the desire to survive in serial zombie texts because they insist without an end point in mind. This means that survival becomes not only a choice but also a site of identification, relocating it from a point of necessity to one of political resonance. Because of the interactivity of episodic form, self-sacrificial legacy becomes about the structure of time to the point that it subjects the viewer to the temporal demands of neoliberal urgencies and therefore its defining social hierarchy. Moreover, the pronounced emphasis on the desire to survive also exposes survivalism's defining paradox in that it is a series of choices made in scenarios that leave no choice, revealing self-sacrifice, as a corollary of this trend, to be, like survival, a choice of non-choices. This aligns episodic self-sacrifice, as substantiated by the desire to survive, to the conditional categorisations and priorities of neoliberalism. As a result, the dominant class' superlative influence over others is cemented in such a way that the internalisation of the desire to survive in the sacrificial victim comes to mimic this very same political cementation of hierarchy.

For the purposes of this chapter, the content of self-sacrifice in TV series that feature prominent zombie narratives will be treated as not significantly different to the content of its depiction in film. As this has already been covered in the previous two sections, the alteration of form and its

influence on the representation of self-sacrifice will provide the basis of this section. In the analysed films, the linear and subjective temporalities exist within a closed loop, the film's duration. With a change to episodic form, self-sacrifice becomes part of an open loop; the reduplicated pressurised legacy cannot imply infinity beyond two temporal boundaries (the start and end of the film) and the *mise en abyme* of self-sacrifice collapses.

The Lacanian approach proposes a detailed study of subjectivity and the dialectical timeframe of self-sacrifice but, under the strain of the seemingly unending episode stream of *The Walking Dead* 2011-present), any generation of inherited and pressurised legacy is diluted but also detained in the symbolic realm. This change in form would mean that a Lacanian reading of the text(s) would struggle to engage with the Real order. *The Walking Dead* will serve as the example of this for three reasons: it features a prominent zombie narrative, its sustained popularity and that it features a spin-off series, *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015-present).

To compensate for a change in self-sacrificial form, a theoretical framework with a different emphasis on reduplication and structure will prove more useful. It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, concerning the flow, production and reproduction of desire, will be used to map the structure of the desire (it becomes so at this point) to survive as a blueprint for episodic structure and the effects on representations of self-sacrifice. This will be then cross-referenced to the multi-stranded growth of Deleuze and Guattari's model to identify the stagnation of survivalist desire and the then-apparent choice of non-choices.

Using deduced differences, the tensions between a self-sacrifice theory of legacies coming into being through absence and Deleuzean productive desire will be consulted. Therefore, the oedipus complex will be reframed by means of developing identity as an unconscious encounter with

primordial competition, rejecting the Lacanian prerequisite of the familial triangle. Productive desire becomes a way into the episodic Real that would be otherwise denied by a Lacanian reading. But even the flow of experiences (narrated and viewed) that surround *The Walking Dead's* episodic world building engender a constant return to the desire to survive (stagnation). Even in a state of flow, they return to the need to survive, to endure in textual form. It outlines a repression of meaning that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, epitomises the organisation of desires and wants to benefit the ruling class. Even if the repeated desire to survive is both productive (narratively motivational) and repressive (successively stagnant), it comes to the same conclusion as Lacanian *mise en abyme* in film. This means that it repeatedly returns to static social hierarchies that are organised in such a way that the upper echelons become more entrenched in accordance to their profit. The introduction of Deleuze and Guattari allows the desire to survive to be read not as the removal of choice or its eternal reduplication but as a succession of non-choice that connects episodic zombie narratives to the neoliberal organisation of social conditions.

It therefore fits that the pressurised legacy of self-sacrifice, which intensifies filmically and fluctuates episodically, is dictated by neoliberal urgencies; it is simultaneously writing and deleting timelines that facilitate and bolster pre-existing hierarchical structures. Moreover, the episodic undulation of intensified and diluted self-sacrificial legacy (as previously detailed) places greater emphasis on the desire to survive than the legacy itself (effectively bypassing legacy once its resonance has dissipated). This means that the choices of non-choice that a survivalist approach necessarily entails align with the ingrained conditional liberty of neoliberalism with survivalism in zombie apocalypse series.

4.4. *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light* as a Ludic Study of the Illusion of Choice

Although it has been established that video games borrow frequently from cinematic representations of self-sacrifice, this thesis is not interested in graphically rendered versions of cinematic self-sacrifice. The final case study of this chapter starts with enquiries into the nature of the illusion of choice and then puts forward a case for ludic, interactive self-sacrifice.

The illusion of choice can only be meaningfully explored in texts that include an element of choice: in this case zombie video games. *Dying Light* (2016) and *The Last of Us* (2013) offer differently nuanced approaches to how they navigate illusions of choice. Videogames are composed of programmed code and therefore convey a limited amount of outcomes no matter how various they may appear. That being said, these ludic, ergodic texts can to certain extents employ or lean into the illusion of choice to generate increments of guidance that enhance player experiences in various ways. Self-sacrifice is explored in a variety of methods including through the appraisal of cut scenes, but again, they resemble the self-sacrifice rubrics as identified in the filmic section of this thesis. Following the fluctuating degrees of agency that are expressed during gameplay, the death of the player/character is examined as a way into understanding cycles of agency, virtual failure and the illusion of choice. The accumulation of player deaths during the navigation of a challenging obstacle is then positioned as a gradual, non-sequential, atemporal self-sacrifice that accumulates outside of the time of the video game's narrative and reframes virtual failure as significantly different to neoliberal constructions of failure. Whilst the neoliberal construction of failure is put into place to manipulate economic notions of scarcity and further stratify social hierarchies, virtual failure can be understood as an accumulation of learning, of failure as a way of reclaiming survival with successive and repeatable deaths. This is then tied to theory regarding neoliberal critiques, positioning virtual failure and ludic self-sacrifice as a means of liberating damaging neoliberal structures and reframing neoliberalism’s tendency to position revenue above the individual.

The following chapter will now examine Seok-woo's self-sacrifice as the paradigmatic example of filmic self-sacrifice. This will then be built into the remainder of the argument that has been previously detailed.

5. Case Study 1 *Train to Busan*: Survival and Emotion in Seok-woo's Last Exchange

The following chapter explores the first case study of this thesis. Now that the methodology has been detailed and the survey has been used to justify the text examined in this case study as a paradigmatic example of separation-based self-sacrifice, the line of argument can develop. Personal sacrifice in the name of survival or emotional self-realisation can be readily absorbed into social identity in a neoliberal setting. This chapter will evaluate the dualistic structure of self-sacrifice in *Train to Busan* (2016, Yeon Sang-ho) by isolating two parallel ways of reading self-sacrifice and investigating how and why they interact with each other. Emotional expression and survivalist determination are herein posited as two separate, but not necessarily opposite, motivational frameworks. These frameworks become the parallel means of structuring the self-sacrifice sequence in which the infected but not yet zombified Seok-woo (Gong Yoo) bids an emotional farewell to his daughter and sacrifices himself so as not to attack her in his impending zombie state by jumping from the back of the advancing train. Consequently, analysis of this structure reveals how the overt (explicit) and underlying (latent) influences of these motive-based frameworks can be localised and the established ways of understanding self-sacrifice in film can be challenged. By these means, this chapter demonstrates that self-sacrifice becomes an important tool not only for interpreting the zombie film genre, but also a means of illuminating how modern neoliberal society is shaped and segmented.

In order to recognise and calibrate the two parts to its structure, self-sacrifice in zombie cinema will be examined in terms of survival-based and emotion-based motivational frameworks. The interaction of these frameworks will be unpacked and their properties, differences and similarities will be appraised and questioned. Examinations of this kind require three different analytical methods that therefore determine the structure of this chapter. The first section will outline how the survival and emotion-based motivational frameworks exist within the same sequence in *Train to*

Busan. The implications of this will be addressed in relation to the organisation of modern neoliberalism and what Paul Verhaeghe recognises as a 'neoliberal meritocracy' (Verhaeghe 2015:127). The second section examines the temporal projections of the characters in the sequence (specifically how the sequence depicts a character's understanding of the future and how their present situation fits into that). These projections are cross-referenced with the specific example of the neoliberal South Korean economic climate to add credence to the proposition that the representation and contextualisation of the need to survive becomes a symptom of the pressures that are ceaselessly exerted to keep its hierarchies in place as it is repeated. The final section of this chapter examines abjection and identity in relation to the chosen sequence in *Train to Busan.* It explores the generation of identity in relation to self-sacrifice and concludes that self-sacrifice is symptomatic of an environment that promotes the gauging of self worth through how others fail, to survive or otherwise.

Train to Busan is a South Korean zombie film that situates the escape from the zombie virus across a series of horrifying train journeys. The previously described sequence will be the sole point of reference for analysis in this chapter because the sequence exemplifies a broader pattern of self-sacrifice as a pressurised neoliberal legacy in zombie narratives. It also allows for emotional and survivalist motivational frameworks to be clearly identified. The first emotion-based motivational framework is characterised by how the sequence can be seen to outline an emotional reaction to the self-sacrifice. This response is presented as a specular image with which the audience can identify. The encouragement of this identification relies on the assumption that emotion determines action and by extension, an emotion-based motivational framework becomes visible in the actions of characters. However, the assumption that emotion determines action overlooks and can potentially obscure the second motivational framework operative in the sequence. This is the survivalist motivational framework: action is determined by a need to survive. Whilst it coexists within the

same sequence, there are many instances in which the same audiovisual material that pronounces the emotion-based motivational framework also strongly foregrounds the need to survive as the primary motivator. Not only does this give the scene a rich ambivalence, but it also allows for these two noticeably different ways of reading the text to be unpacked in a way that understands them in relation to one another.

It is a deliberate decision to label the emotion-based framework first and its survival-based counterpart second because of how they are represented. On one hand, emotionally driven frameworks are visceral, overt, impulsive, instantaneous and tragic. On the other hand, the survivalist framework is logical, calculated and tenacious but equally intense. This means that, as the sequence progresses, it highlights different indications of the underlying motivational frameworks. Consider the chosen sequence in which identification with an emotional response to a crying girl is instantaneous and saddening; it invites the immediate empathy of (identification from) the spectator. In the same scene, her father explains the train's controls to the child's protector who is then able to take control of the locomotive; the father must depart before the zombie infection claims him. The explanation is hardly a striking image; rather it represents the start of a mimetic transfer that gives away the fetishisation of survival that goes beyond staying alive to become a symptom of the intensified pressures of a neoliberal social structure. The instant and immediately recognisable nature of the emotion-based motivational framework makes it easier to relate to in terms of both character and spectator projections. The worrying consequence of this is that the identification with the emotional response to self-sacrifice tends to halt further critical inquiry and cover over the worryingly frequent indications of a social context that has seen its values deformed by a contemporary iteration of social Darwinism. For this reason, the following analyses will start with the emotionally-driven reading of one aspect or theme of the sequence and will go on to show how the survivalist priority governs intentions and character outlooks from beneath.

5.1. Two Ways to Read Seok-woo's Sacrifice

The chosen sequence in *Train to Busan* commences as Seok-woo (Gong Yoo) locks himself away from his daughter Soo-an (Kim Su-an) and Seong-kyeong (Jung Yu-mi) in the knowledge that he is infected with the zombie virus. As he could easily put the others at risk, he attempts to isolate them in the train cabin. By foregrounding the selfless heroism of the father in a way that evokes a deep emotional response from his daughter and encourages the viewer to identify with her sympathetically, this scene encapsulates the concept of self-sacrifice as a construct of compassion veiling the underlying logic of pragmatic survivalism. Before Seok-woo leaves the cabin, his farewell to Soo-an is framed in a series of closeup shots. This repetition of reverse-cut closeups allows proximity to become a means of making inner states of feeling more overt. The works of Béla Balázs provide a helpful way into this process. Balázs champions the close-up as 'the technical precondition for the art of facial expression and hence of the higher art of film in general' (2010: 37). He justifies this assertion in noting that 'every wrinkle becomes a crucial element of character and every twitch of a muscle testifies to a pathos that signals great inner events' (Balázs 2010: 37). With Soo-an, these 'inner events' are unmistakably apparent as she resorts to hysterics. The girl's sense of despair is palpable; the landscape of her face crumples with grief at the prospect of losing her father. Her cries are unequivocally bereft; they show no restraint, no attempt to preserve the vocal cords as they are rattled and shredded to the point that their sonorous quality directly references the physical process of abrasion. The emotional response is physicalised by the proximity of the camera and this facilitates a forceful appeal to the tactile faculty of the senses, to sensation as a filmic signifier of experience. Although they arrive many years after Balázs' foundational theories of film studies, Laura Marks' writings can be read in conjunction to his work convincingly. She proposes that the haptic qualities of film provide considerable insight into the

synergies of the felt closeup.

> Haptic visuality implies a familiarity with the world that the viewer knows through more senses than vision alone. Changes of focus and distance, switches between haptic and optical visual styles, describe the movement between a tactile relationship and a visual one. (Marks 2000: 187)

For Marks, a closeness to the camera's subject characterises the haptic mode of viewing; it restricts the peripheral visualities (often to the point that the visible whole is compromised) so that the texture of the subject can be more intensely explored. Propinquity guides the viewer towards felt experience and uses the telling details in the frame to pronounce the emotion-based motivational framework. For example, there is a soft claustrophobic quality to the closeness of the surrounding cream cabin walls offering both a sense of entrapment that separates Soo-an from her father but also protects her from his eventual cadaverous threat. The localised, confined space of the cabin encloses the haptic honesty of a young girl's bereavement; the intensity of Soo-an's loss is felt because there is no apparent means of escaping it. Viewer and character perspectives are aligned to the same space; the position of the camera notifies us of their nearness, it allocates a certain density to their crowded states of feeling. This gives the impression of a concentrated and impenetrable grief and therefore prioritises the viewer's emotional identification with the response to the self-sacrifice even though the barriers and restrictions of the cabin will go on to provide an invaluable source of shelter as well as the eventual means of reaching Busan.

Emotion-based motivational frameworks are made evident in this sequence by its use of closeup, by cinematic techniques that focus audiovisual material into states of feeling. Closeness to emotional intensity invites the projection of sympathy and a spectatorial identification with this process. The

very same sequence also highlights a survival-based motivational framework that can often be overlooked due to the overt tragedy of its emotion-based counterpart. Many of the pressures and concerns that enforce the need to survive in this sequence also manifest from the pressurising social structures that shape and organise neoliberal communities. It is for this reason that the survivalist motivational framework represented in this sequence should be analysed in detail and be understood as something that goes beyond merely staying alive in a narrative sense.

When Seok-woo gets around to spending his final moments with Soo-an, his phrases are broken and he is quite understandably unsure of the right thing to say. It was suggested earlier that Seok-woo is too overcome with emotion to properly express a sufficient final send-off, however, despite not knowing what to say, Seok-woo still manages to urge his daughter to make her way to Busan. Prior to this, Seok-woo explains the train's controls to Seong-kyeong. As he is pointing out the throttle and the brakes, Seong-kyeong's worried face is framed in medium closeup. Seok-woo is to the right of the picture with his wounded hand between the two characters. Seong-kyeong is discernibly horrified at the prospect of Seok-woo becoming a zombie before he has the chance to leave the cabin. Her face is a mixture of worry and dejection and it seems she would do well to remember the instructions she is given. Seok-woo's maimed hand is positioned in both of his final two human interactions, between himself and the other character. It serves as a visual reminder of the little time he has left but also represents a barrier between the victim and the survivor. For Seong-kyeong, the barrier is a terrifying obstruction, a cognitive indication of both past infections and their capacity to consume her within minutes. Her silence suggests a dualistic state of panic and concentrated learning, of wordless listening out of respect for the imminently doomed and acting as efficiently as possible simply because there is no other choice, a concept that will be explored in more detail further into this chapter. Fear gives away the instinctive survival urge, a need to implement Seok-woo's instructions for her own sake as well as that of Soo-an. Seong-kyeong becomes the focal

point of a network of responsibilities; she is obliged to preserve herself so that she can look after Soo-an and honour the legacy of Seok-woo's sacrifice and she is expected to listen to his tutorial to signify that she will take these responsibilities on. Each expectation makes it more imperative that she survives because each survival brings with it more expectation. The extent of this survival pressure is reciprocated from Seok-woo's perspective and can be understood as further evidence of the necessary post-sacrificial pressure that comes from the survivalist motivational framework.

Seok-woo has many chances to say a meaningful farewell to Soo-an. It is easy to watch the sequence and see it as though the parting dialogue comes from both parties and is poignantly expressed. However, this impression is given by the intensity of Soo-an's heartfelt resistance to her father's departure (and by extension the exemplification of the emotion-based motivational framework). Instead, the interaction is more one-sided. He starts by explaining the locomotive's controls to Seong-kyeong and then implores his daughter to reach Busan, the ultimate objective. What is clear from this is that, of the limited time Seok-woo has left to spend, he spends it ensuring the survival of Soo-an and Seong-kyeong and further pressurising them with the burden of his legacy to necessitate his sacrifice being worthwhile. This is how self-sacrifice, which could seem so against the agenda of survivalism is, in fact founded on and perpetuated from the need to survive.

The interaction between Seok-woo and Seong-kyeong further emphasises the pressures of the survival-based motivational framework. Could Seong-kyeong figure out how the train is operated from experimenting with the limited number of levers and dials represented on screen? It is likely that it would take a few attempts but she would eventually manage. Seok-woo does not see this as a risk worth taking, and it is precisely from how prepared characters are to take risks in certain situations that their intentions and values can be discerned from their actions. Seok-woo leaves nothing to chance, however small that chance might be. He dedicates a good portion of his final

minutes to nullifying the possibility of Seong-kyeong's failure to start the train up which signifies the extent to which his final decisions are pressurised by survivalist motivational frameworks. This passing over of the controls is a didactic initiation as opposed to advice or an effective tutorial, it is an exchange, a ritual passing over and, therefore, an admission of his imminent removal from the small group. Anna Gibbs' treatment of the mimetic transfer in learning and communication presents an effective analytic framework for reading this sequence's teaching process as a means of indicating the extreme value ascribed to survival. Gibbs contends that the process of learning is facilitated by aligning the body with mimetic communication in a way that develops a sense of self-agency (2010: 197). Therefore, it is assumed that agency is attainable when information is successfully passed on. The alignment of bodily action with spatial instruction is apparent as Seok-woo points out the features of the dashboard console. However, his hands and the corresponding levers fall outside the frame of the shot, causing the practical apprehension of the gesture to be called into question. The viewer is led to believe that there is a negligible improvement to Seong-kyeong's control of the locomotive partly because she is patently unresponsive to his direction and partly because Seok-woo's guidance is neglected by the camera. When thought of in terms of self-agency, Seok-woo engages with the didactic process in an attempt to provide options in a seemingly irremediable situation. His agency dissipates at the moment of infection but Seong-kyeong represents the free agent throughout the sequence. The teaching process does not alter the relative levels of agency; rather, it serves to compound the hierarchies that the situation generates. Whether Seok-woo's mission statement affected Seong-kyeong's eventual decisions and motivations can be questioned but this would be missing the point entirely. Survival takes precedence to the extent that no risks are taken whatsoever and, although the means of operating the train could have been picked up heuristically, the obsessive teaching gives away the excessive value ascribed to surviving. This is what is meant by the fetishisation of survival. It becomes an act of precision in a world so chaotic that it leaves us with little else to perfect.

So how does the initial influence of the emotion-based motivational framework giving way to the survival based one and its ensuing social pressurisations tie into the modern structure of neoliberal society? And how can a representation of the survivalist motivational framework go beyond survival? The answers to these questions lie with how Paul Verhaeghe characterises the progression of modern neoliberalism. Verhaeghe outlines the key pressures of the neoliberal system in terms of what is referred to 'rank and yank' or the 20/70/10 model. He explains this as follows:

> HR managers at multinationals are expected to apply the 20/70/10 rule. Twenty out of every hundred employees are the high flyers, seventy provide the critical mass, and ten should be given the boot, even if sufficient profit and growth has been achieved. (Verhaeghe 2015: 123)

Verhaeghe supports the argument that an ideology such as neoliberalism is very much defined by the forces that allow for its growth and in this case the 20/70/10 is very much that driving force. It purportedly ensures greater profit and productivity. Yet it also brings with it certain performance pressures that are a necessary byproduct of structuring society in this way and incorporating competition into a communal daily routine in a way that has become normative. Profit is no longer about profit; it becomes a constant chain of transgressions. The 'rank and yank' model is very much a system that goes well beyond each period it exists in. Its recurring legacy perpetuates the neoliberal agenda and its pressures keep the winners and losers in their respective places. It generates a social hierarchy that is used to gauge the individual against how they compare against the failures of others. It is certainly telling that within the imagined filmic escape from the neoliberal institutions that come with the zombie apocalypse, the same ideas of recursive pressurised social hierarchies remain when everything else has fallen to ruin. It is as though these

social structures are so ingrained in the collective unconscious of neoliberal communities that they cannot fathom an alternative. Like profit, survival becomes a chain of transgressions, in both circumstances, what is valued is generated to the point of excess and the most striking transgression of all is self-sacrifice itself. But even that does not break away from survival drives because its legacy causes peripheral figures to rally around the sacrifice. In many ways self-sacrifice is a reimagination of the 20/70/10 with a supplanted legacy that drives social pressures and constructs their hierarchies. The pressurised formation of social strata along with the controlling limits imposed by the legacy of such organisation become the competitive hypostases that the apocalypse fantasy cannot break away from. Any identification with representations of emotion-based motivational frameworks (on the part of the character or the spectator) distract from this alarming truth. Each depiction of unrest, chaos and disorder that have become necessary to post-apocalyptic cinema fall apart without the survival-based motivational framework. It is as if this genre has lost the will to portray insights into the experiences of the zombie apocalypse and is merely fixated on their artificial preservation; survival can be a part of the narrative and not necessarily its only purpose. Therefore, when survival transgresses itself (as seen with a motivationally survivalist interpretation of Seok-woo's sacrifice) it resonates with the transgression of profit and simultaneously the expenditure of the self to become a means of fortifying, verifying and visualising the neoliberal agenda and its seemingly inescapable influence.

5.2. Projected Temporalities and South Korean Neoliberalism

Readings of emotional and survival-based motivational frameworks can be explored in terms of their temporal projections now that their co-existence and interaction within the self-sacrifice sequence has been examined. The characters in the sequence are motivated by timelines or projected temporalities that deviate from the predominantly linear organisation of the sequence. For example, on one hand, memories or visualisations can suggest timeframes that expand out from the

focal point of the narrated present and can be interpreted as part of an emotion-based motivational framework. On the other hand, survival suggests an almost infinite timeframe that must necessarily outlast the duration of the film and therefore any representation of character motivations. Time in this sequence tends to progress in a linear fashion with regards to the narrative and yet the way that characters project their ideas of what has happened or what will happen complicates such linearity and gives it a depth that can be analysed. The temporal progression of the scene that emphasises an emotion-based motivational framework will be explored in terms of the works of Paul Ricoeur and his understanding of how alternate temporal narrative can enrich the present. Ricoeur provides a framework that can aid with the understanding of some of the temporal complexities with the narrative depiction of self-sacrifice. This will be followed by drawing from Derrida to understand the chronological projections of survival. Although consulting Derrida's work appears to complicate the largely post-Lacanian framework that Verhaeghe uses to define neoliberal drives, Derrida's stance on recursion and the deferral of sameness fits well with how Verhaeghe outlines the expansion of neoliberalism. Following this, the interpretation of character temporal projections through Jacques Derrida's work will be shown to outline how the act of survival is always a deferral. It is by its nature necessary that the immediate danger that is to be survived is deferred so that the next danger-event can be survived and so on.

Ricoeur equates the rearrangement of linear narrative to the establishment of a richer textual experience; meaning can be found in the ways that the narrative decentres filmic time.

> As the narrative is pulled ahead by everything that happens – however small it may be – in the narrated time, it is at the same time pulled backward, delayed so to speak, by ample excursions into the past, which constitute so many events in thought, interpolated into in long sequences, between brief spurts of action. (Ricoeur 1985: 103)

Ricoeur values the depth that the narrated past can add to the narrative present. There is a complexity to the differences between the fictional here-and-now and narrated recollection that extends sequences of dramatic action and gives away previously inaccessible information. This process can be observed during the series of cuts to and from Seok-woo's non-narrative haven that articulate his sacrifice in the emotive nuances of fatherhood, in the subtler details of rediscovering the parental role in death. It is significant that the baby is new-born as it indicates the euphoric freshness of new parenthood, the potentialities of life, and a movement away from linear temporality. There is an extreme closeup of Seok-woo tenderly touching his daughter's foot that is directly analogous with the shot earlier in the sequence that showed him holding his daughter's hand as he removed her fingers from his sleeve. This closeup in itself sets up a comparison between the two gentle points of bodily contact. One exists in a hellish nightmare in which the father must die to prevent a bloodbath and the other takes place in a perpetual, immaterial sanctuary. Both provide the viewer with a landscape of emotion, be it tranquility or despair at either pole, but it is the oscillation between the two instances in the sequence that teases the viewer into an even deeper state of melancholy. Here, a devastating reality is counterbalanced by the haunting residue of a perfect world. Again, what emerges from this collision of the real and the ideal is a sense of mourning. Seok-woo, once more, smiles as if to indicate a state of peace, of ontological resolution. His sacrifice is the ultimate act of devotion a father can make and, as her silent cries persist, Soo-an's vocalisations are replaced by the non-diegetic, musical realisation of Seok-woo's final words to her. This temporal structure is distinctly ruminative. As opposed to regarding Seok-woo's projections into the past as a memory, an inert moment set in opposition to the impetus of the present moment, he reflects on a dynamic point in the past that is simultaneously projecting forward. The chronological depth and richness that this gives to the sequence is a testament to the film itself but also, as evidenced by the previous analysis, a means of foregrounding the emotion-

based motivational framework. This is because the temporal projections of aspirations and eventualities that greatly enrich the sequence do so because they invite spectatorial identification with them, whether they have happened/ are yet to happen or not. This temporal representation of the emotion-based motivational framework is clearly at odds with its survivalist counterweight. Survival-based motivational frameworks are solely concerned with moving towards the next objective. From the survivalist's perspective, the idea that emotion can be the main director of agency and intention is obstructive and a distraction from the absolute governance of survival. Whilst there are some exceptions to the rule, the survivalist motivational framework constantly looks to preserve its forward-facing impetus, as evidenced by the following analysis.

All of Seok-woo's attempts at soothing his daughter are survivor-centric; Soo-an is assured that it is safe in Busan and the city is incentivised as an end goal as if it is not already clear enough that they must make it to Busan in order to get out of their current situation alive. This way of structuring character motivations relies on a point of projection in future time that is defined by the present struggle and driven by the pronounced deviation of actual present and projected future scenarios. Once the temporal deviation elapses, (the goal is either attained or left unattained) the objective must be reconstructed in another future temporality so that the meaning of the present can be recalibrated. This is an imprint, a brand, that is scorched into the collective motivations and post-apocalyptic workflow of the characters in the film. The pressures that motivate self-sacrifice in the name of survival in *Train to Busan* originate from the pressure that continually reasserts the neoliberal system and keeps it in place. The structure of surviving is important in this aspect because it allows its messages to be repeated to excess. Constantly reiterating the importance of survival brings to the fore the removal of choice that fighting to survive necessitates. Any repetition of a new goal-based outlook is reimagined in the present moment; this process repeats itself every time there is another hardship to survive through and a sacrifice is required. The difficulties of this

objective-based epistemology can be better understood in relation to Jacques Derrida's following quote:

> The verb "to differ" (différer) […] expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalising that puts off until "later" what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible. (Derrida 1982 :129-130)

Derrida observes the unavailability of the world beyond language through language. In naming something its meaning is endlessly deferred. It is this deferral that is resonant with the strain of neoliberalism that has already been discussed in reference to Verhaeghe, one that comes about from the quantification of qualitative experience. Indeed once something becomes quantified it becomes an infinite sequence of numerals that correspond to the amount of times meaning is deferred as is the case with Derrida, or the amount of times an immediate danger is navigated within the survivalist narrative. Both concepts share that difficult to articulate sequence of infinite deferrals, but when considered in reference to the goal and journey-based teleology of *Train to Busan* there is the suggestion that the destination implies an unending series of journeys and that survival is just a means to the next end. Derrida provides a play on words that presents difference as the deferral of sameness. Therefore, difference can be understood as an infinite succession of intervals that remain unresolved. This value given to an infinite loop contests the closure of narrative goals; it goes against the resolution of spatiotemporal events by correctly recognising their perpetuity and, in doing so, exposes the transience of the endgame. This reveals the temporality of survival to be a projection that necessarily goes beyond the film. The characters who survive *Train to Busan,* Soo-an and Seong-kyeong, transgress the film's duration and by extension the notion of constant survival goes beyond what the film can express, in that Soo-an and Seong-kyeong's wellbeing cannot be verified past the concluding scenes. Therefore, once the survival-based motivational

framework goes beyond the chosen sequence and indeed the end of the film, the projected temporality of survival, including the pressurised legacy of the self-sacrifice is caught in a feedback loop that perpetually attempts to and necessarily fails to envision survival beyond the film. This is how survival goes beyond surviving because when explored in a solely temporal format, its only substance is transgression. Therefore, the temporal structure of the survivalist motivational framework can be identified as continuously transgressive. This is the same temporal structure of neoliberalism that is defined by quarterly reports and reviews continuously imploring the individual to transgress themselves, their measurable statistic. The film markets this constant representation of striving like tinnitus it has become accustomed to, as if its silent ringing presence is something that should be expected merely because of its appearance in the everyday. As Verhaeghe points out, the development of a digitised, internet-age of instant communication and around-the-clock connectedness allows for the neoliberal agenda to demand more profit, more efficiency (2014: 126). The temporal, economic, digital, social and competitive transgressions become ever more frequent demands that ask more of the individual's performance and lifestyle, subjecting them to the pressured hierarchy of neoliberal structures to an even greater extent.

Another timeframe that connects the survival-based motivational framework to the order of neoliberal society is that of the development of a specifically South Korean-based brand of neoliberalism. From its conversion from autocracy to social democracy in 1997, South Korea has taken on advanced economic growth with its acceptance of a now globalised strain of neoliberalism. According to David Hundt, the Korean neoliberalism that began to surface at the turn of this millennium skipped past the western liberal economy into a staunchly organised, state subsidised market designed to buoy the once struggling economy (Hundt 2015: 5). This economic climate represents a necessary antecedent to the apocalyptic, infected world *Train to Busan* articulates. Seok-woo shares this neoliberal precursor; his character epitomises the neoliberal ambition of more

success, more business and more market stability at the start of the film. The young fund manager is consumed by his occupation to the point that his relationship with his daughter suffers for it. His job becomes his identity and securing clients and maximising profit margins take precedence over his responsibility as a father. In many ways, his self-sacrifice can be seen as a redemption for years of occupation-centric obsession but that would be to misread his self-sacrifice. This is because the sacrifice is transactional, and has its own temporal projections that complicate the link between the film's setting and its future. The sacrifice generates its meaning after the sacrifice takes place, meaning that its use and legacy are only fully realised retrospectively to Seok-woo's eventual zombification. The temporal projections of this sacrifice can be understood in terms of their short and long term effects. It is in the short term that the sacrifice is redemptive, in the short term that it is an emotional release (and therefore identifiable as part of the emotion-based motivational framework). In the long-term it converts the pressures that hounded Seok-woo for most of his adult life into a different kind of pressure, an obligatory debt that will continue to define Soo-an and Seong-kyeong's identity, a further need to survive to ensure that Seok-woo's heroism was not in vain. And it is this kind of pressurised legacy that neatly lays out the temporalities of self-sacrifice as a social transaction, a neoliberal investment that hangs over the survivors pressuring them and fetishising survival over and over. Because self-sacrifice comes into being through its own absence, through its legacy, it generates a debt that connects subsequent acts of self-sacrifice. It is certainly not beyond the realms of imagination that Soo-an will one day have to repay her debt to her father having already been integrated into a chain of legacies in a post-neoliberal apocalyptic culture. This notion of connected chains of self-sacrifice and their legacy will be discussed in further detail in chapter 6.

5.3. Identifying with self-sacrifice and Self-abjection

As Seok-woo is simultaneously taking on the role of the father and the potential zombie threat, he

comes to embody the tension between danger and safety. The transitional phase of the virus disrupts Soo-an's impression of her father's identity because, visually, he corresponds to her expectation (apart from a few early onset symptoms) yet Seok-woo's awareness of the virus' incubation period causes his behavior to deviate from her expectations dramatically. This ambiguity generates a point of contradiction that can be understood in terms of how Julia Kristeva outlines abjection. Kristeva fits in alongside Verhaeghe's definitions of neoliberalism because they both draw from Lacanian arguments to formulate their respective theoretical positions. Moreover, Kristeva is particularly useful for the discussion of zombie film because of how the zombie can be characterised as abject, disgusting but fascinating and unnervingly in-between. She notes that it is 'not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva 1982: 4). Seok-woo is the father who is not a father; his newfound commitment to his family consumes him more completely than the latent zombie virus, that simultaneously encroaches from the liminalities of his body, from feverish bloodstreams and his in-betweenness of desperate feeling. Kristeva holds that the abject is not only the 'border that has become an object' but also the 'border that has encroached upon everything' (1982: 3) and this fittingly sums up Soo-an's experience of her father's behaviour. The sequence itself is a cluster of vestibule walls, portholes and partitions. Many of the shots are framed by riveted white metal backdrops that signal both the locality of the train but also these encroaching, ever present borders; the frequency with which they appear in the scene is a physical manifestation of how, paradoxically, separation has become Seok-woo's last act of devotion to his family. Seok-woo must balance his role as a father, as recognised by his daughter, alongside his own understanding of how to keep her safe. These two ways of interpreting his own self-worth are necessarily incompatible; his departure is, to Soo-an, an implied neglect but, at the same time, his refusal to leave would kill her. This sets up Seok-woo's identity crisis whereby his self-view and the view of his daughter cannot be aligned. As this impasse is essential to the filmic construction of the

self-sacrifice's decision-making process it must be explored in detail and will be analysed in terms of both how the loss of the father is abjective and how this loss brings on what Kristeva refers to as 'self-abjection' in Soo-an's response to his actions. Soo-an's resistance to her father's self-sacrifice comes from a place of hopelessness where Seok-woo's ambivalent self-identification calls into question her own role as a daughter and pressurises her into reasserting her familial attachment to him; she resists his decision by appearing unequivocally child-like yet, at the same time, painstakingly bereft. The father-daughter relationship is heavily and forcefully reasserted by a breakdown in the correspondence of their identities. As such, this part of the sequence resonates with Kristeva's claim that the abject grows from a disturbance of identity but it also pronounces a dominant air of sadness. The absence of a fully-realised zombie in this case facilitates her misrecognition, it allows her to be unsure, confused and eventually hysteric. If her father reappeared after the virus had fully taken over, this sense of ambiguity would give way to outright fear.

Because of its fiercely repugnant appearance, the final-stage zombie subject would cause revulsion. Whilst it should be recognised that not all emotional succession is a direct process of displacement, adjacent and proximal emotions invariably leave traces on each other. The interaction, deferral and displacement of different emotional states outlines a poignant train of thought that can be traced back all the way to Baruch Spinoza who suggested that our emotions 'can only be controlled or destroyed through an idea of a modification of the body contrary to, and stronger than, that which we are undergoing' (1677: 11). Kristeva's notion of disruptive abjection is clearly channeling this succession of emotion: fear can dilute joviality and melancholy can be tainted by anger. In the same way, the repulsion caused by the explicit gore of a close-up zombie can compromise the potential emotive value of self-sacrifice. In the sequence, the trace of the zombie, as indicated by the indelible mark of the zombie bite, is preferred to the decayed rabid iteration of Soo-an's father. Consequently, though the figure of the zombie does instil fear, the absence of a disgusting stimulus

does less to diminish the sense of loss. Therefore, by the Spinozan train of thought, the ‘stronger’, ‘contrary’ stimulus (explicit zombie) over-faces those who are in a state of grieving for the sacrifice as they are distracted by revulsion. It is the decision to assuage the image of hideousness (full zombie) by conveying only the trace of the zombie here that allows the self-sacrifice to be portrayed with greater sentimental value.

Now that Soo-an’s experience of the loss of her father has been outlined as abject, further analysis can reveal how the resultant grief brings about self-abjection and how that process is particularly meaningful when situated in neoliberal social systems. When considered in terms of emotion and survival-based motivational frameworks, Soo-an’s emotionally charged hysterical outbursts exhibit a pronounced extremity that makes them difficult to watch. It makes her behaviour more than merely sad or tragic; the extra force given to their delivery makes her sense of loss so explicitly clear that it goes beyond representations of weeping or sadness. Her father’s sacrifice tears her life apart and that sense of ripping, of rending her expectations, takes on an almost hypnotic quality. It is for this reason that the identification with the emotional motivational framework comes as a side-effect of seeing Soo-an’s reaction to Seok-woo’s departure as abject. To get a greater understanding of how this scene relates to the survival-based motivational framework, the concept of self-abjection must be first defined. Kristeva outlines self-abjection in the following terms:

> Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself. (1982: 3)

Kristeva points out how abjection is part of the process by which the sense of self is formed in the first interaction with the other (the parents). She documents the rejection of food as a means of setting up of barriers that constitute the self as the other in the parental agenda. This idea of expelling the self is a marking of boundaries, a feeble, tottering step towards independence. Self-abjection takes place when these boundaries encroach upon every aspect of the individual's being, when the separation from the parental form becomes too distinct, and irreparably damaged. Kristeva uses the example of 'a child that has swallowed his parents up too soon, and frightens himself on that account' (Kristeva 1982: 5). Notably, Seok-woo is consumed all 'too soon' in the eyes of Soo-an, albeit by the zombie virus and not his grief-stricken daughter. However, the father's consumption necessarily preserves the daughter and grants an increased sense of independence that relies on the expulsion (separation) of Soo-an and the proliferation of barriers that ensures that a separation from Seok-woo is assimilated into her identity. Here there is an implication that the separation from the parents generates an individual distance that is essential to the generation of independent identity. As Verhaeghe correctly points out, the need to converge and diverge, to and from parental figures, is an essential prerequisite to the formation of selfhood and then identity. He observes that 'identity is always the temporary product of the interplay between merging and establishing a distance' (Verhaeghe 2015: 11). Therefore, identity becomes self-abjective once difference and/or similarity become absolute, when consumption or exile completely take over to the point of no return; as can be seen during Seok-woo's sacrifice, he is both consumed by the virus and both wilfully and eternally separated from his daughter in order for her to live on. In a development of his argument, Verhaeghe notes that 'the urge for autonomy, is nowadays regarded as a desirable, even necessary characteristic' (Verhaeghe 2015: 11). He continues to point out that dependence is shunned and considered pathetic in neoliberal society. The neoliberal championing of independent traits sees the formation of neoliberal identity necessarily take on similarities to the

self-abjective process. Luc Boltanksi and Ève Chiapello discuss the idea of independence in the neoliberal work place as follows:

> Occupations previously characterized by a high degree of independence, like those of sales representatives, are today put under pressure as a result of the complete computerization of customer records, the portability of computers, techniques of transmission from a distance, and the obligation to key in data after or during each visit. (2005: 248)

Here, the quantification of personal performance through laptop data monitoring is seen as a necessary counter measure to remove degrees of agency in situations that require independence. Therefore the quantification of performance certainly champions the restriction of agency through data tracking so long as the position can be marketed to the individual as independent. This outlines how independence and taking on responsibility is fetishised in a neoliberal setting so long as it can be recorded and quantified. But this understanding of responsibility needs to be complicated because Soo-an is a child and her taking on responsibility can be read alternatively. Seok-woo's self-sacrifice restricts Soo-an, it separates her and enforces the reconfiguration of her self-identity with a greater sense of independence, with a greater sense of being her own person and being distinct from parental influences. Soo-an is subjected to self-abjection by the heroic actions of her father and this process mirrors the neoliberal structure designed to segment its communities by commodifying independence. The structure of neoliberalism strives to reinforce itself and preserve its dominance and it does so by promoting a self-abjective sense of separateness that, in promoting individuality, serves to dilute the influence of the individual all the while perpetuating their sense of useful ambition. It is this point of contradiction that ties self-abjection with competition: when considering the range of identities in a society, the desire to be more independent or 'self-made' to a greater extent will eventually have to be gauged in terms of similarly singular individuals. Seok-

woo's self-sacrifice appears to deny that survival is about an increased demand for robust independence in that Soo-an is directly dependent on her father's sacrifice for her survival (which, as has already been established, is fetishised in its filmic representation). Moreover, she is forced to show resilience and a greater sense of maturity in wake of her father's legacy, navigating and internalising the psychological repercussions it brings with it.

5.4. What is Exchanged? The Call for an Inquiry into Subjective Iterations of Self-value

In conclusion, Seok-woo's self-sacrifice in *Train to Busan* can be read in terms of two separate but not diametrically opposed motivational frameworks: emotion (and character/audience identification with that emotion) drives action and the need to survive offers a similar but more intensified drive. Both drives must coexist in the self-sacrifice but one will take precedence in an identification with the sequence. It is the survivalist motivational framework that provides a telling link to the social structure of neoliberalism as defined by Verhaeghe. By being able to read the self-sacrifice in two ways one must partially obstruct the other. When the emotion-based motivational framework is identified with, the survivalist counterweight is obscured and so too is its valuable insights into the malfunctions of neoliberal society. The first section demonstrates that the need to survive as represented in this film (self-sacrifice included) is tied to the growth and pressurisation of neoliberal social structures. Profit is part of the same identification as fetishised survival, making it necessarily, and absolutely, transgressive. The second section draws its conclusions from the analysis of temporal projections from within and beyond the self-sacrifice sequence. Here, analysis explores the self-sacrifice as a transaction and locates its value after it has occurred. It builds on the conclusions from the previous section by considering the legacy of the sacrifice as a debt and ties the temporality of the self-sacrificial legacy to its neoliberal counterpart through an outwardly imposed pressure. The final section makes its conclusions through Kristeva and the idea of

abjection. By considering Soo-an's reaction to her father's sacrifice as self-abjective it enforces an unnatural, consuming independence that is by Verhaeghe's reckoning championed by neoliberal social structures. This, in turn, causes intense competition partly because it is a natural consequence of a social order 'championing' any characteristic trait, and partly because it endorses an individualism that can distract from senses of community and cooperation. The self-sacrifice sequence in *Train to Busan* is an excellent example of the two motivational frameworks coexisting in one sequence that it justifies itself as a case-study in its self-sacrificial eloquence. Therefore, what *Train to Busan* illustrates is that representations of self-sacrifice can be about survival, but survival as a persistent metaphor for ever-intensifying neoliberal social competition. This can be understood as an intricately woven network of legacies, pressures and transactions that explores ideas of emotion and survival with commendable verve. The fetishisation of survival shows, in its reflection, a society structured by profit, endlessly reconfigured in the name of transgressing itself. What *Train to Busan* ultimately demonstrates is that the impulse to self-sacrifice channels this neoliberal tendency and maps out its pressures, but that because of this impulse the trains of thought carrying the neoliberal compulsion fall ironically short of their destination. To further develop the trains of thought explored in this chapter, the understanding of represented self-sacrifice as an exchange must be examined in more detail. The temporal projections of self-sacrificial in the name of survival will be consulted in the upcoming study of a decoy-based paradigm; the notion of decoy itself characterising a lateral excursion from the progression of linear time, a misdirection of the end-goal. The idea of individualism as a neoliberally sought-after declaration of independent responsibility focuses on how selfhood is perceived in the formation of identity. This calls for the next case study to be not only a paradigmatic example of decoy-based self-sacrifice, but also an inquiry into what selfhood can be worth, how it can be valued and perhaps most disconcertingly, how it can be entered into a process of exchange.

6. [REC]: *Mise en Abyme* of Self-sacrifice as a Neoliberal Signifier

The preceding chapter called for a deeper inquiry as to the nature of selfhood in the context of represented self-sacrifice in zombie narratives. It made a call for examining exactly what the self is valued as in self-sacrifice. This chapter examines the concept and practice of self-sacrifice in the Spanish horror film *[REC]* (Balagueró and Plaza, 2007). By resituating the camera in the diegesis of the plot, this film, as is the case with other found footage and *cinéma-vérité*, complicates notions of selfhood by fusing personal and cinematic perspectives. Superseding the assumption that the camera stands in for the eyes of the audience, the camera/self model develops from the notion that the camera signifies otherwise unknowable information about its operator that an audience can identify with. The construction of this self-signified point of view will be analysed through the application of Lacanian frameworks, starting with the mirror stage and incorporating a reassessment of Baudry's apparatus theory in terms of its possible application to both found-footage film and *cinéma-vérité*. This analysis will thereby interpret how represented self-sacrifices in *[REC]* combine to form a signifying chain (Lacan 1966). The analysis holds that the slippage of meaning can be read as a survivalist symptom with which the mostly hand-held, *vérité* style camera/self can identify. Indeed, this is achieved because the camera/self is simultaneously experiencing and documenting the violence of the self-sacrifice. Analysis of key scenes will employ Lacan's metaphorical/metonymical framework in order to trace the symbolic chain through its underlying drives of the Real. The limits of the film's signification will indicate the impetus of character motivations as they seek to transgress them through the cinematic frame, the imposed quarantine and the geographic boundaries beyond it. This chapter thus investigates how self-sacrifice in *[REC]* acts as a deferring signifier of social deformity, one that might not achieve the goals of survival, infection or documentation but with each deferral makes the influence of hyper-competition in a

modern, urban, cosmopolitan, European and global context more evident.

This chapter will examine *[REC]* in order to determine how the self and subjectivity is constructed and valued in relation to self-sacrifice. It also unpacks how self-sacrifice can be read as a signifying metaphor along a self-sacrificial signifying chain, as a representation of neoliberal systems of social stratification. The following exploration of self-sacrifice will be set up in three stages: the establishment of a camera/self model in terms of its interactions with self-sacrifice, an investigation as to how the film's self-sacrifices are connected and an inspection of the imposed quarantine in relation to how it could relate to political trends that allow for socio-economic hierarchisation. The study of *[REC]* begins with an analysis of how it signifies self-perspective. The film's sequels, *[REC] 2* ([Balagueró and Plaza, 2009], *[REC] 3: Genesis* [Plaza, 2012] and *[REC] 4: Apocalypse* [Balagueró, 2014]), for the purposes of this chapter, will be acknowledged but not covered in detail because they are the logical extension of the signifying chain of self-sacrifices which must be examined, in isolation (in the spirit of the film) before the further conclusions can be applied.

6.1. Decoding the Camera/Self: Recording the Reflection

The examination of self-sacrifice in *[REC]* is complicated by how the film arranges and constructs its perspective and how this way of seeing is aligned to the camera within the narrative diegesis. Analysis of the film's presentation of selfhood in its different versions paves the way for a means of understanding self-sacrifice in terms of its translation into *cinéma-vérité*. Pioneered by the documentaries of Jean Rouch and inspired by the theorisations of Dziga Vertov, *cinéma-vérité* is characterised as an attempt to 'create a reality between documentary and fiction through the camera's coexisting attributes of objectivity and subjectivity' (Bruni 2002). The handheld, mobile and often chaotic camera-work can be read as two visual associations: the alignment of the camera to the perspective of camera operator Pablo (Pablo Rosso) and, by extension, a sense that visual

signifiers, such as movement and framing, operating through the first-person perspective, also signify a camera/self that complicates the depiction of other 'othered' selves in the film. Before the effects of these associations can be examined in relation to self-sacrifice, the film's representation of perspectives and selfhood must first be assessed in the sequence that sees Ángela (Manuela Velasco) and Pablo confront the first infected victim. Ángela bursts into shot from the right, imploring Pablo to 'get this on tape'. She shouts with an urgency that distracts from the relatively gentle sway of the frame and is in contrast to the sudden lunge down to the left that stretches and defies the camera's technical capacity to match the frame-rate of the movement's rapidity. The result is a surge of surfaces, steps, railings and blurred skin, a barely comprehensible stream of textures with just a hint of a push from Ángela as Pablo sprints up the stairs. This blurring of the shot will be returned to later and is essential to *[REC]* as a whole but also to its representation of self-sacrifice. The push and Pablo's ascent generate a clear synchronicity, whereby the movement of the camera indicates physical action beyond the frame (feet on steps) and yet physicality outside of the frame (Ángela's push) is indicated, through Pablo, in the footage captured by the camera in his hands. There is a dialectical relationship between what is within the frame, specifically the visual perspective that grows out of it (but also doubles back onto itself), and the action beyond its boundaries. It is this dialectic that associates Pablo with the camera within the narrative diegesis. This association adds veracity to the events taking place immediately in front of the camera by spatially synchronising character movement and the position of the frame. So, is the camera/self-reliant on Pablo? And what happens when Pablo is removed from the position of cameraman at the terrifying conclusion to the film?

The camera/self is a temporary construct that is being written into the present as the visual information is written in film. It forms as the actions of the camera operator find their voluntary and involuntary realisations in small movements of the camera that signify inner realities. It is hard to

say that the camera/self is the relation between Pablo and the camera because he puts it down and is later removed from it. But each separation is the residue of a previously inscribed spatiotemporal contact. When Pablo is away from the camera, the camera lies on the floor with an alienating stillness; it is terrifying because the self is removed and the camera/self comes into being through its own absence, it is reinforced by the mark it leaves on the camera's isolated position. The camera/self is not reliant on the absolute connection between camera and operator and in many ways, it is projected into the past in the same way that the filmed footage is. But what it must be is indicative of a sense of self, no matter how slight the visual indication may be. It is the symptom of the person holding the camera, every jarring twitch, every startled lunge, blurred into the spatiotemporal positioning of its operator. It presents a visual sense of self that draws identification from its audience. The alignment of eyes and camera is an important point of visual association and therefore spectatorial identification, but the representation of the camera is different to what would usually be seen by the human eye. The blurring and shakiness represent a reminder that the visual material is camera-recorded; which is in itself a movement towards the camera/self. The true visual representation of what it would look like to actually run through that building in Barcelona is not represented in found footage film because of the camera's technological limitations. They remind the spectator that they are not projecting onto a true experience of selfhood but a camera/self, the signification of selfhood as projected through the camera lens.

To theoretically establish and introduce this idea of the camera/self, other critical takes on the relationship between the camera, point of view and audience projections of identity must first be consulted. Xavier Aldana Reyes recognises that: 'Given that found footage aims to strengthen the artificial alignment between vision/body of the film and vision/body of the viewer via the camera holder, a restricted visual field potentially makes that link appear more organic' (2015: 8). There are clearly two alignments of body and camera here (filmic and spectatorial) and the 'camera

holder' (Pablo) is relegated to an intermediary that moves between the two. Aldana Reyes continues 'I would, in fact, contend that the point is to actually bypass the intermediary subject altogether so that camera viewpoint and viewer may become almost synergetic' (2015: 8). However, the 'synergy' between viewpoint and viewer is in fact an indication that the camera/self is operating convincingly. This is because it encourages audience identification with the subjective position, viewpoint and movement of the camera that generates a sense of experience that spectators can implant themselves into. Seeing Pablo as a go-between is inhibitive to this process because his actions are so etched into, and therefore signified by, the audio-visual material that defines spectatorial identification that he cannot be disentangled from the viewer's identification with the filmic scenarios he appears in. Even when he is away from the camera, his absence generates an alienating, heavy stillness that signifies a self-lack that is particularly disconcerting when compared to the frantic, haphazard consequences of his presence. Anne E. Hardcastle is also a proponent of the alignment of the camera lens and the projection of the spectator's viewpoint: 'In identifying the subjective position of protagonists with the camera's gaze throughout the film, found footage horror curiously empowers, at least temporarily, these future victims and the audience who sees through their eyes/camera' (2017: 112). The 'eyes/camera' model also aligns the camera's point of view with audience projections of self. There is also a hierarchy implied by this projection whereby the envisioned subjects are elevated by being the subject of the camera/eye's gaze but the reverse is also true because the framing of the character also exposes them to the unseen space beyond the boundaries of the viewfinder. As previously demonstrated by the footage that documents Ángela's push on Pablo, the space outside of the frame is just as important to the camera/self as what takes place within it. William J. Nichols calls this identification with the negative space around the point of view the 'de-centring' of the viewer's position in relation to the film. He notes that 'the viewer's position becomes de-centred, where he or she is simultaneously inside and outside the film as well as in front of and behind the camera' (Nichols 2017: 192). As a result, the viewer is able to project

their fears and anxieties onto the common unknown of what is outside of the frame. Essentially, there is no way that someone watching the film can verify that the unknown dangers projected out, from around the limit of the point of view are any different from what is not on-screen. This combination of humanised camera movement, visual indications of self-insight, synergetic eye/ camera alignments and identification with off-screen potentialities provide the criteria of what makes the formation of the camera-self through audience projection possible. What is more, according to Jean-Claude Seguin:

> What constitutes the originality of *[REC]* is that the camera, as an actor, is an absolute and definitive element that is essential to the existence of the movie. The characters can disappear, the camera man can die, only the camera needs to continue to film, even if it is alone […] As such, *[REC]* offers a range of situations, among which the sequences in which the point of view identified with the anthropomorphic actor (Pedro Rosso […]) dominates, ignoring the distance that sometimes separates the objective and the viewfinder, in the case of an absence of direct vision. (2017: 225)

Notably, Seguin emphasises that the point of view takes on an anthropomorphosis, to form the camera/self, which implicitly necessitates the need for a human agent to aid the spectator's relation to the character's immediate situation (projection of identity). What he lauds as the defining original facet of the film is the primacy of the camera. This is in the sense that the camera is the origin of the film and yet its diegetic emergence from the quarantined building remains a mystery until the sequels. Seguin also appears to draw from the primacy of the camera, that the camera as an actor in itself is the driving impetus of the film, but this statement is actually realising the camera/self without giving it credit. Any mention of the camera as an actor has been, to some extent, anthropomorphised and is therefore an admission of the inextricable humanity of the camera/self.

The camera does transcend Pablo and it does exist without him, but as has already been covered, this eventuality exists with a different tone and a very different process of identifying with it (alienation over transportation). Furthermore, if the camera/self is not reliant on Pablo, then why does he form such a large and convincing aspect of it? This is because, like our own sense of self, it exists in the present for milliseconds, it dissolves into the past the moment one realises that it exists. This feeling of slippage and the recognition of past-selves is not only reminiscent of certain processes of Lacan's mirror stage (1949) but it is also how the camera/self is formed as the film is recorded. It makes sense that the camera/self takes on the same temporal slippage as the understanding selfhood in the human subject. This means that the camera/self is only partly reliant on Pablo. Whoever takes on the mantle of the spectatorial projections in the future would have the same camera/self formation, dependent on that section of the film's direction. The vital characteristic of the camera/self is that it signifies itself through its own perspective.

Now that a camera/self has been established, it can be integrated into the Lacanian theory of the mirror stage to see how signifiers of self-perspective encroach and interact with the documentation of self-sacrifice. *[REC]*'s treatment of the camera/self is particularly important when regarding self-sacrifice. This is because it questions the idea of a cinematically represented self. In other films that put forward a more normative version of self-sacrifice, the sacrifice is presented through the established standards of 'invisible editing' whereby the other on-screen becomes the self because there are no visual significations of selfhood within the frame. *[REC]*'s presentation of the camera/self complicates this because Pablo, the self that the audience is closest to, is not sacrificed. However, if Sergio's or Manu's sacrifices were to be represented by non-found footage editing and not so closely associated with Pablo, there would be no doubt as to their self-sacrificial status. Whilst it could be argued that this is because other non-found footage representations of self-sacrifice demonstrate a greater degree of volition, the sense of self that the volunteering represents

would still be at odds with the signified camera/self. With the representation of the camera/self, it appears more as an 'other' sacrifice and it is precisely this tension between different modes of represented selfhood that call for the terms 'othered' and 'signified' self-sacrifices. This will be made clear in the following analyses.

Following the previously described sequence, Pablo stops in the middle of the fourth flight of stairs: his heavy breathing matches to the slight undulation of the frame. Sergio (Jorge-Yamam Serrano) and Manu proceed to the long hallway. The narrow, deep space opens out into a larger room and this is followed by a pan approximately 100 degrees to the left that intimates Pablo's search for the infected Jennifer (Claudia Silva). She appears from the left of the frame. It is Sergio who takes responsibility for applying the tranquiliser to the young girl, who stands motionless, several feet from him. The torch light flickers over her vacant features, vomited blood seeping through the fabric of her clothes. As Sergio gets closer to the infected girl, the camera zoom also incrementally approaches. He is doomed the second he turns away to ask, 'what happened to her eyes?' Jennifer shrieks and bites down into the side of his neck. The precise moment of infection provides a way into the mirror stage that is described as follows:

> It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as an identification, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term 'imago'. (Lacan 1949: 76)

This extract details the precise moment that an infant misrecognises their sense of selfhood as a cohesive unit by identifying with a complete reflected image; when in fact, selfhood operates as a fragmented series of images that are in a state of perpetual flux. In *[REC]* The split-second

movement of the camera/self simultaneously indicates Sergio's infection and Pablo's shock. The distortion occurs at a granular level here. The movement of the image that is blurred distorts the footage into a fragmented version of reality. This is the site of identification in the mirror stage because it is a manifestation of Pablo's reaction etched into the film's visual information, rendering it a projected self-reflection. This process therefore simultaneously represents a signification of the inner workings of the camera/self and, within the digital memory encoding of the camera, takes up in a concentric fashion the visual data that constitutes a loss of self (at this point only partially by his own volition). This successive stream of images represented by the self-sacrifice footage makes up a cohesive fantasy that covers up the conflicting fragmentary signification of the camera/self in opposition to the loss of self. It is this fantasy that puts forward an on-screen, alienating ambiguity that becomes the site of reflection that the mirror stage requires.

Once Jennifer and Sergio are engaged in a struggle, the shot erratically zooms out. The screen is darkened by a complete obstruction for several seconds before Sergio resumes the act of trying to remove the girl's hammering teeth from his shoulder. His face is pulled into a grimace as the camera spirals backwards, washing over fleeting yet no less intense snapshots of the attack. At one point, Pablo moves the camera too close to her and she turns for him, spitting blood on the camera's lens, reaching for it, touching it, and striking it so that its microphone glitches out. Manu steps in to assist and it is at this point that Sergio's self-sacrifice crystallises into its fullest realisation. Sergio holds the girl with her flailing limbs and teeth and tells Manu and Pablo to 'get out of the way!' The application of the mirror stage finds its greatest value once the sacrifice has been realised because, as well as operating as a reflection on a visual level, it is active as a temporal reflection but also a temporal projection. Lacan explains this idea in the following terms:

> This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the

> individual's formation into history: the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation – and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an 'orthopaedic' form of its totality – and to the finally donned armour of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. (1949: 78)

Lacan points out how the infant who becomes self-aware for the first time is simultaneously predicting a state of greater control of their body but also retrospectively understanding that they have come from a comparatively futile state of uncoordinated movement. The subject's aspiration and understanding of their own inadequacy is repeatedly cemented in the present as it is claimed that the mirror stage 'pushes precipitously from insufficiency'. The relevance of an infant's first encounter with self-awareness to this study comes from Lacan's supposition that the temporal bind of projecting self-identity futuristically through prediction and historically through retrospection shapes the entirety of the subject's mental development. It therefore follows that this advent of self-realisation can be used to trace desires that arise from the idealising fantasies to produce the illusion of a unified self. Because self-sacrifice is driven by a retroactively formed conception of history in conjunction with an anticipatory projection of the future, the mirror stage can be used to identify similar drives in *[REC]*'s representation of self-sacrifice. The realisation of Sergio's self-sacrificial decision is anchored at his point of infection and projected beyond his death. This is reflected by the reactions of the other people in the group. The sacrifice-victim identifies with their own relation to their past insufficiencies that is precipitated in the anticipation of the others' escape. His inadequacy in the past makes him look to make up for it in the future and this is also the temporal mode of the mirror stage. This tension is reflected in the image of Sergio restraining Jennifer, but in this case, it makes for a retrospective video recording (as opposed to Sergio's transgressive forward projection).

As a result, the visual representation of the self-sacrifice in *[REC]* makes for an overlap between the temporal dialectics of the 'othered' self and the 'signified' camera/self, associating them through a chain of retroaction and anticipation. As Pablo lingers between documenting the severity of Sergio's injuries and the bravery of his choice, his identification with the unfolding footage oscillates from ensuring the integrity of its images by covering what has happened, to ensuring that the filming retains the capacity to continue by means of his escape. Retrospective documentation and anticipatory self-preservation are motivational frameworks that suggest social constructs founded on competitive growth and relative contempt for the other. Both of their outcomes generate supposed success from the individuation and resolution of the ambiguous self-models.

Jean Louis Baudry points out how 'ideological effects' such as hyper-competition can be drawn from the cinematic apparatus. He states that the camera creates 'a fantasmatization of the subject' and contributes to 'the maintenance of idealism' (Baudry 1974: 46). This statement has a particular resonance with *[REC]* because the camera is integrated into its narrative as a signified self. Although his gruesome self-sacrifice is far from an idealism, it represents a kind of competition that is undoubtedly idealised within the neoliberal narrative. Recording Sergio's sacrifice is both a documentation of his audacity but also necessarily a failure to survive, as the act of escaping is at the same time a necessary failure to record footage. The fleeting successes are marred by the spectre of failure that corresponds to the patently modern tendency to construct notions of hierarchy (and therefore self-identification) in terms of failure. This is because the mirror stage always originates from a point of insufficiency and the anticipatory drives that mobilise identification fall short of expectation. Therefore, in *[REC]*, two very different, out of phase, dissonant perspectives of temporal identification make up the successive fantasies of the mirror stage. They do so in relation to self-sacrifice in a way that purports to offer logical narrative progression but leaves only an alienating, fragmented struggle of perspectives. The resultant ambiguity, in all of its fragments and

both of its intelligible readings, outlines symptoms of a hyper-competitive epistemology that, as will become clear further into this chapter, extends far beyond this isolated event.

6.2. From Sacrifice to Sacrifice: Pulling the Signifying Chain

The second part of this chapter will investigate the relationships between self-sacrifices by examining how previous traces of self-expenditure reemerge in subsequent representations of self-sacrifice. To understand the connections that tie instances of self-sacrifice together, the tail-end of Sergio's sacrifice must be reconsulted. Sergio restrains the infected girl, their clothes soaked in blood, their visibility within the frame obscured by the gloom and the tremulous hand of the camera/self. The escape continues, seeing Manu incapacitate a ferocious, screaming Ms. Izquierdo (Martha Carbonell) before a rush of blurs denote their arrival back at the entrance where infected people are crawling out from under the shutter that sealed them in the warehouse. Once Manu confronts the health inspector (Ben Temple), imploring him to unlock Maricarmen's (Maria Lanau) handcuffs, there is a marked change in how the scene signifies depicted events. Upon the realisation that 'the policeman has the key' for Maricarmen's handcuffs (who was locked to the stair rail because she was vomited on by her infected daughter Jennifer), the impossibility of her escape from the current danger is collectively realised through the trace of, policeman, Sergio's sacrifice. As the health inspector collides with Pablo in his attempt to flee, the camera/self signifies this impact in terms of the resultant audio glitching that recalls Jennifer's crazed grabbing for the lens/eye. This presently depicted event is tainted by its traumatic references to Sergio's sacrifice because it also marks the origin of Mari's condemnation; the lens/eye signifies the impasse through its own residue. Moreover, because the camera/self mediates the documentation of both sets of events, it becomes a conduit that channels, and even maps out, the connection between Sergio's decision to save Pablo and Manu as well as his own inability to come up with the key to Maricarmen's release.

Therefore, the footage that leads up to Maricarmen's enforced self-sacrifice is linked to Sergio's self-sacrifice causally, through the withheld key, but also through their mutual relation to the camera/self. Every similarity that takes shape after Ángela apologises to Maricarmen for leaving her to be cannibalised recalls the point at which the brutality was unknowingly realised. For instance, Pablo's turn down and to the left of the rail watches the infected as they bite into her and references how the camera/self was also trapped between documenting and escaping as Sergio made his sacrifice, inadvertently leaving Mari to her presently documented fate. Even the eventual decision to escape connects the self-sacrifice to the previous link of the self-sacrifice chain, with its blurs of marble floors and dimly-lit walls each signifying a frantic dash away from the priorly doomed decoy but also vividly recollecting the previous iteration of this action through the camera/self's perspective. The visual resemblances activate a deferral of meaning that is unlocked with successive sacrifices, connecting them in terms of how they glorify survival as the ultimate, necessarily unreachable goal and how this drives hyper-competitive pressures.

Now that the causal, visual, perceptual and camera/self-based connections between self-sacrifices have been established, the framework of the signifying chain can be applied to the deferral of the self-sacrifices within *[REC]*. Lacan understands this process to be a futile attempt to generate coherence along systems of meaning. In language for instance, the descriptive act of answering the question of 'what is a tree?' with the response 'it is a tall woody plant with leaves and fruit' is hounded only by more questions. The same hounding enquiries defer along the self-sacrifice signifying chain but instead ask 'what was the sacrifice for?' It is not in the answer to the question but in the 'insistence' of its proposition that the meaning of the self-sacrificial chain finds its underlying competitive impetus. Lacan states that the signifying chain 'gives an approximate idea: links by which a necklace firmly hooks onto a link of another necklace made of links' (1966: 418). Maricarmen is quite literally cuffed to a chain 'made of links' but is, at the same time a link in the

'necklace' of self-sacrifices that lace *[REC]*'s duration. As can be seen from the previous analysis, the link between Sergio's and Maricarmen's self-sacrifice is realised through the lens/eye in the similarities between the footage of, and slightly beyond, their final minutes. Even the discrepancies between the sacrifices, the obvious one being that Sergio is a willing sacrifice and Mari is not, point to a causal linkage that seems to render the signifying chain of sacrifices an inescapable spine running through the body of the film. Although Manu's survival up until this point is reliant on both Sergio and Mari's sacrifices (justifying the causal link of the chain), his self-sacrifice appears to be an exception to the previously mentioned spine of self-sacrifices because the visual and camera/ self-based resemblances are cancelled out by a detour through Guillem's (Carlos Vicente) apartment. This could be said to mark a break in the signifying chain when in fact it enriches its metonymic and metaphoric modes of expression.

To further explore how Manu's sacrifice generates meaning as part of a self-sacrificial chain, the source of Lacan's theorisations of metaphor and metonymy must first be consulted. Roman Jakobson distinguishes between 'the faculty for selection and substitution' and the faculty for 'combination and contexture' in an investigation of aphasia and how the human subject might struggle to formulate speech (1956: 109). He concludes that '[m]etaphor is alien to the similarity disorder, and metonymy to the contiguity disorder' (Jakobson 1956: 109). From this, Lacan supposes that metaphor is a displacement of similarity ('the woman was a queen in her house' – 'woman' is displaced by 'queen' because they are of equal status) and metonymy is a displacement of contiguity ('the woman took on the power of the crown in her house' – 'the crown' is a reference outside the immediate contiguity and is therefore a part that defers to the whole beyond it). He also contests and complicates the proposed dualism of Jakobson's train of thought by applying the poles of metaphor and metonymy to the symbolic chain of signifiers:

> Metaphor's creative spark does not spring forth from the juxtaposition of two images, that is, of two equally actualized signifiers. It flashes between two signifiers, one of which has replaced the other by taking the other's place in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present by virtue of its (metonymic) connection to the rest of the chain. (Lacan 1966: 418)

Metonymy, therefore, is at once the force that binds the links of the signifying chain together but also a reference point that ensures that the 'flash' of the metaphoric spark can coexist along, and be readable within the context of the chain. With each self-sacrifice, there is a metonymic carrying-over to the next. Successive deferrals then allow for the insistence of meaning through metaphor. Exactly how this takes place becomes clear with the consideration of Manu's sacrifice which, as has been established, is only causally (metonymically) linked to its predecessors. To understand how the metaphor of self-sacrifice is generated through the metonymic insistence of meaning, the structure of the metonymy within the sequence must first be established. As Manu smashes in the door to Guillem's apartment, he loudly volunteers to 'stay behind' and guard the entrance. The spotlight of the camera washes over his bloodied overalls as it turns into the apartment, providing an implicit reminder that he will soon be left in complete darkness. This reminder also serves to mark the point at which the camera/self diverges from the direct representation of Manu's sacrifice. The camera/self documents the search for the penthouse key which comes to metonymically signify Manu's voluntary demise. Many parallels can be seen here with Jakobson's description 'of Anna Karenina's suicide [as] Tolstoy's artistic attention is focused on the heroine's handbag' (1956: 109). The dislocation of the lens/eye achieves this same metonymic effect. It changes the focus and framing of the scenario but leaves enough evidence behind to prevent the loss of the metonymic self-sacrifice association; the light from the camera/self moves away from Manu to denote the lack of visibility that all but seals his fate. At this point, the metonymic structure of the remaining frames of Manu's

self-sacrifice will reveal their concentricity because, within the metonymy that defers the visual immediacy of his infection, the search for the key is also a metonymic process. Every turn into an adjoining room, every pulled door-handle, every search through a cluttered draw is a signified fragment that corresponds to the projected, envisioned whole, that of finding the correct key. Even when the key is found, it is hidden on an excessively populated keyring and can only be verified through its relation to the authority of the correct door: the part unit must defer to the whole unit once again. The camera/self relates to these concentric levels of metonymy not only as a way of directing and framing the search (and by implication not Manu), it also directly contributes to it, it fills in the gaps, it makes the increments between the successive deferrals narrower still. As the lens/ eye searches, it swiftly pans, jerks and frantically scans its darkened surroundings, its images blur and stagger themselves into a stream of still frames that cannot keep up with the camera's speed. This effect is returned to from the first section, but now its signification is focused on how each individual digital frame is a deferral to the next, how the pressurised desire to look can petrify the captured footage in what come to be metonymic increments that delay the presently realised anticipation for the next.

Manu's self-sacrifice is concentrically metonymic with the camera/self following each link, each level of metonymy, as the search for the key spirals concentrically in on itself. The question at this point is: how does metaphor 'flash' between the levels of metonymy that Manu's self-sacrifice sequence represents? And what meaning does the metaphor generate? The meaning that can be taken from each metonymic deferral is that of the need to survive. Indeed, survival is a deeply metonymic construct; it is always a movement to the next link of the chain, the next stage of procedure and this drive is reinforced by every link from Sergio's sacrifice to the discovery of the keys to the penthouse and beyond. The insistence of survival to this extent reads as a survivalist tick, a symptom that gives away an underlying sickness, an obsessive neurosis that springs forward

from the space left by every single metonymic deferral. This symptom becomes the metaphor for a hyper-competitive society that is further complicated by the camera/self. Once the camera/self identifies with self-sacrifice as part of a metonymic chain (as seen in Manu's death sequence), it generates some clear contradictions whereby the self is at once continuously preserved, and by extension metonymically intact, and continuously sacrificed, and by extension metaphorically resonant. This tension produces an effect akin to the alignment of mirror reflections, an infinite fractal of subsequent impressions otherwise known as *mise en abyme*. The disjuncture that cultivates this reduplication takes on an expansive metaphorical form by positing the two polarised ways of thinking that define competition and setting them against one another repeatedly. It is not about the decision of whether to preserve the self or not but the dissemination of this decision as two insoluble, opposing, conflicting, competing, eventualities. This is what *[REC]* captures metaphorically with the incorporation of the camera/self to its symbolic chain of self-sacrifices.

6.3. Beyond the Camera/Self: Appraising the Neoliberal Real

With the establishment of the Lacanian signifying chain of sacrifices that runs through *[REC]* and generates metaphorical meaning, the resonances of this metaphor can be explored in terms of the film's context. This third and final section of the chapter will start by exploring the meaning of the signifying chain's metaphor as a symptom that goes beyond the symbolic order and is framed in the Real order. The question here is: what does the implied infinite recursion of the signifying chain of self-sacrifices beyond the temporal boundaries of the film mean in a neoliberal context? How does this *mise en abyme* of self-sacrifice read as a mirror stage admission of self-insufficiency? And how does the repetition of self-sacrifice to such implied infinity resonate as a recognisably neoliberal deformity of social value?

Opposition and segregation are symptoms of ingrained hyper-competition operating at the level of

the Real order. Self-sacrifice as a recursive signifying chain goes beyond the temporal boundaries of the film and symptomises the infinite individuation and separation of the ego formed from the mirror stage in a state of opposed reflection. *Mise en abyme* articulates an 'everyone for themselves' mindset disseminated far beyond the formation of personal identity and makes it about the collective. The alignment of socially distributed mirror stages is reflected by the alignment of mirroring and causally-linked self-sacrifices. The drive of self-sacrifices in *[REC]* is metonymic and constituted by the internalisation of survivalism that is common to self-sacrifices, but metaphorically, the connection of these acts as they are represented here is indicative of ingrained social and neoliberal competition. This is because, as has been established, the mirror stage holds that identity is formed from a position of insufficiency that is perpetuated for the remainder of adult life. The *mise en abyme* of self-sacrifices actualises the dissemination of this state of identity, with each individual simultaneously reflective of and opposed to the other, and the collective motion to compensate for the collective insufficiency gives rise to competition. Because the impulse to compete is formed into collective identity, it is argued that this kind of widespread competition is normative and therefore socially ingrained. This demonstrates how outward recursion becomes a metaphor for competition as the definitive property of collective identity. However, competitive identity can also be identified as part of an inwardly concentric trend of separation and opposition in *[REC]*. The reaffirmation of segregations, boundaries, fortifications and quarantines will be posited as an individualisation that translates to an 'everyone for themselves' mindset. Like self-sacrifice, the implementation of boundaries is repeated in *[REC]*. The constant opposition of the camera/self, the sacrificed self and other oppositions of self/other boundaries can be seen as a neurotic symptom that represses a raw unfathomable reality. Lacan points out the interrelativity of the construction of the symptom and its cause:

> Similarly, though here in the mental sphere, we find fortified structures constructed, the

> metaphors for which arise spontaneously, as if deriving from the subjects very symptoms, to designate the mechanisms of obsessive neurosis: inversion, isolation, reduplication, undoing what has been done and displacement. (Lacan 1949: 77–78)

Here, Lacan relates the symptom to its point of origin in terms of how the cause is locked into the Real unconscious. This idea is particularly relevant for the diagnosis of patients of psychotherapy but it is also particularly meaningful in reference to *[REC]* because of how it represents a fortification that ultimately serves as a metaphor for social competition. *[REC]* depicts many instances of fortifications, boundaries and barricades as is clarified by the following sequence. Sergio goes to open the wrought-iron doors to the apartment complex. As the health inspector enters into the complex, another opaque veil can be seen draped to the floor with flashing lights behind it. This reveals the third line of barriers installed by the authorities but also hints at ground units stationed beyond it. The second plastic curtain suggests that it is not just a case of obscuring vision but also airflow. It is directly indicative of excess fortification; the regular secure, sturdy iron gates are transcended twice over. Moreover, the final act of veiling does nothing to suggest that the containment process does not continue beyond what can be seen. Personal barricades reinforce these fortifications and can be identified as the health inspector's hazmat suit and gas mask that represent an obviously hopeless attempt to resist infection. Each fortification is a level of control, a layer of restriction that physically (and perhaps understandably) distances bodies but it does so to excess. There is a surplus separative veiling that amounts to an overt rejection of the other but also the instatement of a hierarchy of power. Indeed, even the state operatives who enter the building are reduced to a rung below those on the outside as the health inspector discovers to his horror as he realises he cannot leave the building.

It is useful to consider Nichols' observation that pertains to the concentric generation of power

structures and how individuals are included in them. This also outlines how separation is used to act out and reaffirm the social hierarchies of neoliberalism that are both created by and perpetuate ingrained hyper-competition.

> In order to reaffirm the boundaries that separate self from other, the structures of power reproduce themselves in *[REC]* to create concentric circles that desire to quarantine perceived threats. When an armed police officer trapped inside the building draws his gun on others who are uninfected while his back is to the window draped in opaque plastic, he unwittingly recreates the structure of power that has sealed him inside. (Nichols 2017: 195)

Here, Nichols puts forward power structures as a means of defining self and other whereby the subordinate necessarily becomes the other. The concentric circles of power form a chain that links the infected individuals to state operatives and then on to their superiors. It is with the reaffirmation of boundaries that positions of power are indicated, each repetition denoting a further desire to quarantine. But from the perspective of the camera/self and the rest of the trapped individuals these positions of power become the other. This generates the idea of exterior interiority (quarantined state operatives) and interior exteriority (the implication of the quarantine through the lens/eye) coexisting with the ‘othered self’ (the self-sacrifice witness) and the ‘selfed other’ (camera/self). This situation comes about because the quarantine is more complicated than separating out an interior and exterior model that corresponds to self/other. It is maintained that the neurotic re-application of boundaries represents how separation, and the reaffirmation of individualism can relate to subordination and the generation of a hierarchy whose upper echelons are a fixed vantage point and the competition to survive only serves to reinforce the fixity of social standings. The resistance to the quarantines and state incarcerations serve to catalyse the opposition to their respective authorities; there is an identification that comes with the desire to outline selfhood

through both the imposition and objection to the enforced borders of an outside authority. This identification comes into being by retaining the illusion of a cohesive self-model that stems from the first moments of subconscious 'insufficiency' that Lacan noted during the mirror stage.

To further nuance representations of boundaries and separateness, it is not only the act of separation as part of power structures that defines the self/other models of *[REC]* but the co-signification in the external-facing footage of the camera/self. This is because the camera/self is at once the strongest signifier of self-perspective in the film and the conduit through which all of the visual material passes through. Therefore, the representations of blockades, barriers and their subsequent layers of reinforcement associate with the camera/self through both the recording of the fortification process and the very predicament of being diegetically contained. Ángela's attempt at fleeing through the first-floor balcony is almost immediately thwarted by armed personnel and canine units swathing the quarantine's breach. This creates a paradox between an external fortification that comes to be defined by its interior, through the capture of the camera/self, and the internal perspective of the outside that is at once the driving force of the diegetic narrative yet always just out of reach. From the point of quarantine, the lens/eye actualises the film's only knowable signifier of the outside but is, at the same time, contained by it. This formulation of the internal outside resonates with Lacan's definition of the Real order not only because it too remains ultimately out of reach but also because it perpetuates primordial survival drives. Each person trapped inside the house strives to escape its oppressive boundary, to go beyond the signification of the quarantine. They fail almost without exception but at least the need to survive keeps them occupied in the meantime: it provides the limit of signification that is both inescapable and irresistible. The individual desires to appease the void that defines their existence but the Real does not operate by the same presence/absence dialectics of the symbolic order and desire is met only by more desire. Exploring the internal/external paradoxes of the Real will provide a way of tracing the symbolic chain of self-sacrifices to its impetus and

indicate its meaning as a hierarchical construction that relies on the instances of failure it sets up.

To recap, the signifying chain of self-sacrifices in *[REC]* articulates the recursive opposition of individuals that reflects the dissolution of communal solidarity into internalised competitive mindsets. Moreover, the same pattern can be observed inwardly through the film with the obsessive depiction of fortification quarantines and boundaries. At this point it is important to add theoretical nuance to the notions of ingrained competition and social hierarchies in a neoliberal context. Verhaeghe puts forward the idea that a shift in collective morality is a neoliberal deformity because it is purely utilitarian in nature; concepts of 'good' and 'bad' are discarded for that which is beneficial to those in positions of power and influence:

> The loss of a communal code of ethics has led to a new, purely utilitarian morality. Everything is quantified in terms of production, growth and profit. Organisations must therefore carry out frequent evaluations, which soon come to resemble controls. Every individual is suspect, since everyone is focused on their own profit. On top of that, organisations are run by individuals who necessarily also seek their own profit, and who are consequently even more suspect. They, too, must be evaluated and controlled - which raises the question of who is controlling the controllers. (Verhaeghe 2014: 173)

The above statement positions its main critique of neoliberalism as its inescapable demand for quantification, an accusation that, at first glance may not bear too much relevance to *[REC]*. However, numerification is a transgressive structure; it is, by definition, a system by which four is always one more than five and so on ad infinitum. It is therefore, by a Lacanian reckoning, metonymic in nature. And, just like survival, it generates a signifying chain whereby each link is necessarily a transgression of the one that preceded it. It therefore also follows that the signifying

chain of self-sacrifices is a quantification because the amount of self-sacrifices that take place attribute degrees of value to survival. In this equation, notions of survival and production become interchangeable because of the different contexts that they emerge from; they both can be reduced to a formulation of self-interest which is further complicated by the camera/self and how the film can represent subjectivity and selfhood. Verhaeghe makes further statements regarding the representation of control and hierarchy. With a truly utilitarian morality, fortifications and barriers are easier to put up in front of people in danger. The need for the separation and opposition of individuals is invariably to the benefit of the 'controllers' or the 'controllers of the controllers'. Verhaeghe's consideration also makes evident the power structures that become the benefactors of social competition. Decisions and competitions occur exclusively to the benefit of the 'controllers of the controllers' in both *[REC]* and neoliberal scenarios as described by Verhaeghe. Moreover, not only does the perpetuation of constructed social competition reinforce such power structures, by extension, neoliberal social hierarchies are further embedded by the failure that supports the winners/losers moral compass of neoliberalism. By this logic, competition replaces the precedent morality of good/bad whereby failure is punished and success is rewarded. Survival (like success in neoliberal conditions) becomes a measure of self-worth regardless of whether its value is negative or positive. Furthermore, William Davies supports this argument in claiming that '[a]s a replacement for the pursuit of justice itself, neoliberalism offers the goal of competition as a form of quasijustice, which lacks a substantive concept of the common good (2014: 105). This is why the positioning of self-sacrifice in *[REC]* can be read as a critique of neoliberal competition, because systems of justice incite competitive outcomes that benefit the state. The quarantine admittedly benefits the proximal community as well as the state, but it is the imposition of barriers that heap the pressure on to survive, specifically to those at the foot of the social hierarchy. Verhaeghe also points to a connection between survivalism and social competition which is articulated in the following:

> Thus the feeling of 'belonging', so strongly promoted in the initial stage of the meritocracy, disappears completely. On top of this staff are increasingly hired on a project-by-project basis, so that they have to work furiously and compete with one another right from the start in the hope that their contracts will be extended. This system can only reward a few 'winners', giving rise to fear (Will I keep my job?) and jealousy (I bet he'll be kept on, he's always sucking up to the boss'). The lack of team spirit creates a need for team building, not infrequently - oh, irony - in the form of survival (of-the-fittest) weekends. Solidarity makes way for mistrust. (Verhaeghe 2014: 172)

Here Verhaeghe captures the individualistic structure that is represented by the *mise en abyme* of self-sacrifices; the results-driven (quantified) mentality delivers a performance that can always be improved upon, giving rise to the comparative competitive mindset that so often comes with it. Moreover, the cultural panacea to this predicament is seen as a survival weekend invariably at the end of a 'survival week' at the office. It can be helpful to think of *[REC]* as a survival weekend, a zombie quarantine scenario tokenistically funded by a large corporation in an attempt to raise staff morale. Following Verhaeghe's logic, would there be any instances of self-sacrifice to link together? Is there also something ironic to locating the significance of the *mise en abyme* of self-sacrifices, that may appear altruistic to differing degrees, to the dissemination of a 'save yourself' mentality? It would be unlikely that any self-sacrifices would be present in a neoliberally organised survival weekend. It is argued that the repetition of self-sacrifices is an idealism in the same vein of the assumption that survival weekends could operate as an effective team-building exercise. Therefore, as well as seeing the signifying chain of self-sacrifices in *[REC]* as a pressurising ritual to further pressurise survival goals and entrench social hierarchies, it can also be read as an ideal that stems from a neoliberal sociopolitical climate whose reality would be wholly devoid of any sentiments of

genuine self-sacrifice.

6.4. Extending the Time Frame: Moving to Self-sacrifice in Longer-form Media

In conclusion, the analysis of how *[REC]* presents self-sacrifice demonstrates that the incorporation of the first-person perspective of the camera complicates how the idea of selfhood is represented. The association and spatial synchronisation of Pablo and the camera calls for the camera/self framework as a way of identifying the tensions between how the self is signified. The Lacanian mirror stage exemplifies how these tensions between documentation and self-preservation form the phantasm of a cohesive narrative whole. Beneath the reflection, there is an underlying ambiguity that doubles as an idealised motion towards hyper-individuation as a way of pitting projections of self-worth against each other. Communities are tied historically and cinematically to the driving competition that underpins the very conception of self-awareness.

With the analysis of the interconnectedness of self-sacrifices, it becomes evident that each sacrifice facilitates and drives the next one. Every present sacrifice is made possible by its succession of predecessors and will go on to generate the circumstances that call for the sacrifice of others. From this, the application of the signifying chain outlines the metonymic nature of self-sacrifice in *[REC]*. The camera/self model's interaction with this endlessly deferring structure gives it metaphoric value in a *mise en abyme* of opposed selves. The recursive 'self versus self' pictorially signifies the underlying competitive impetus that has now become the norm. It typifies the self's 'precipitation from a point of insufficiency' of the mirror stage on a wider scale, a symbolic dissemination, as it becomes applicable to a society and not merely an individual.

Finally, the competitive thrust of neoliberalism moves beyond the signifying chain and its metaphoric value to its source in the Real order. By diagnosing the insistence of self-sacrifice in the

signifying chain as a neurotic symptom, its cause can be explored in terms of the camera/self and its context. The resistance to the quarantines and state incarcerations serve to catalyse the opposition to their respective authorities; there is an identification that comes with the desire to outline selfhood through both the imposition and objection to the enforced borders of an outside authority. This identification comes into being by retaining the illusion of a cohesive self-model that stems from the first moments of subconscious ‘insufficiency’ that Lacan noted during the mirror stage. It therefore seems fitting that self-sacrifice constantly demands transcendence; there were three sequels to follow, after all. Although the divergence of ‘othered’ and ‘signified’ selves represents a necessary, inevitable demise, it also marks the beginning of a new way of reading the traces or sequels of selfhood that follow. Long live the living dead!

7. The Legacy of Self-sacrifice as Flow and the Return to a Desire to Survive

Now that the value of self in filmic represented self-sacrifices has been established, this study's line of argument can progress beyond the examination of film and found-footage texts. In the previous chapter that discussed the paradigmatic example of decoy-based self-sacrifice in film, the legacy of self-sacrifice was found to be a recursive construct that reacts to the cumulative pressures of neoliberal social and political conditions. This chapter is concerned with what happens to these pressurised legacies when they exist over longer periods of narrative time. How are they affected? And how does this change resonate contextually? The political frameworks of self-sacrifice will be analysed in terms of how they generate meaning in episodic form. This is because episodic form alters the timeframes of self-sacrifice in such a way that it foregrounds how the intentions and organisation of a society are set up to keep the ruling class in a position of influence. This process will be explored in detail further into the chapter. It will be contended that the need to survive in films becomes the desire to survive in serial texts because they insist without an end-point in mind and that survival is fetishised to the point that it is more about forced continuation than life or death. Moreover, recurrent episodes ensure a change in how the legacy of self-sacrifice is understood; it is no longer an exponential pressurisation whose amplification is projected beyond the end of the narrative (as argued for in film in previous chapters). Instead, the legacy as desire to survive ebbs and flows, being periodically displaced by other narrative manifestations of the desire to survive, and is then temporarily diluted by the succession of episodes and the transmutation of other survival pressures; just as self-sacrifice can be a pressuring force of survivalism, group responsibility, parental roles and romantic involvements can work to the same effect so long as survival is the ultimate goal. The change of form and consequent prolonging of narrative timeframes positions survival, ostensibly, as a choice but also a site of identification, relocating it from a point of necessity (no choice) to one of desires (false choice) and therefore political resonance.

Moreover, the pronounced emphasis on the desire to survive exposes survivalism's defining paradox in that it is a series of choices made in scenarios that leave no choice, revealing self-sacrifice, as a corollary of this trend, to be, like survival, a choice of non-choices. The change in form also alters the temporalities of self-sacrifice. Because episodic form has an element of interactivity, the timeframes it makes available to its viewership can be both fragmented and incremental. This means that the legacy of self-sacrifice is incorporated into the structure of personal time to the point that it complies with the temporal demands of neoliberal urgencies. Therefore, the desire to survive as a choice of non-choices is openly compatible with increasingly episodic neoliberal lifestyles to the point that it can be complicit in upholding social hierarchies. It will be argued that the frequent representation of survival as a choice of non-choices finds its hypostases in the contemporary political landscape, for example, in neoliberal promises of wider healthcare options as justification for legislation that exclusively benefits the super-rich (Verhaeghe 2014: 130-131). In other words, episodic self-sacrifice, as substantiated by the desire to survive, aligns with a fittingly neoliberal illusion of choice, resonating with the conditional categorisations and priorities of neoliberalism. As a result of this illusion of choice, of collective (survival) desires funnelled and organised to suit often concealed powerful agendas, the dominant class' superlative influence over others is cemented in such a way that the internalisation of the desire to survive in the sacrificial victim comes to mimic this very same political cementation of hierarchy.

For the purposes of this chapter, the content of self-sacrifice in television series that feature prominent zombie narratives will be treated as not significantly different to the content of its depiction in film because this has already been covered in the previous two chapter. Instead, the alteration of form and its influence on the representation of self-sacrifice will contribute the basis of this chapter. In the previously analysed films, the linear and subjective temporalities exist within a

closed loop, the film's duration. With a change to episodic form, self-sacrifice becomes part of an open loop; the reduplicated pressurised legacy cannot imply infinity beyond two temporal boundaries (the start and end of the film) and the *mise en abyme* of self-sacrifice collapses in relation to the series.

The Lacanian approach allows for a detailed study of subjectivity and the dialectical timeframe of self-sacrifice but, under the strain of the seemingly unending episode stream of *The Walking Dead*, which has many series, any generation of inherited and pressurised legacy is diluted but also detained in the symbolic realm. This change in form would mean that a Lacanian reading of the text(s) would struggle to engage with the real order. *The Walking Dead* (2011-) will serve as the example for this for three reasons: it features a prominent zombie narrative, its considerable contribution to the modern zombie discourse and that it features a spin-off series, *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015-)

7.1. Schizoanalysis, Self-sacrifice and Legacy in Relation to Episodic Form

To compensate for a change in self-sacrificial form, a theoretical framework with a different perspective on reduplication and therefore episodic structure will prove more useful. It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari's writings on the flow, production and reproduction of desire will be used to map the desire to survive as a blueprint for episodic form and the effects on representations of self-sacrifice. In consulting Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), certain theoretical dissonances are introduced, the most obvious being that Lacan followed Sigmund Freud as a proponent of the Oedipus complex in his theorisations. Lacan notes that the formation of identity moves through a

> succession of crises - weaning, intrusion, Oedipus, puberty, and adolescence - each of which produces a new synthesis of the ego systems [*appareils*] in a form that is ever more alienating for the drives that are frustrated therein, and ever less ideal for the drives that are normalized thereby. (2006: 115)

The inclusion of Oedipus details his Freudian alignment and yet there are other aspects of this passage that allow for alternate ways of understanding the development of identity. An understanding that ego systems are synthesised by crises reveals the true nature of identity to be a fragmented series of alienating inadequacies. Moreover, the assumption of familial authority in the crises that Lacan describes in a contemporary setting is displaced by the alienating effect of identity and supplanted by experiences of inadequacy that can be produced by the family unit but not necessitated by it. If the drives that come with the Lacanian formulation of identity can be socially normalised, this too is evidence that it is the structure of repeated inadequacy that channels the formation of identity ahead of the inherent authority of the family model. The normalisation occurs concentrically within the socially assumed normative western nuclear family structure which means that the same normalisation of drives (or desires that present themselves with the formation of identity) that projects from an assumed self-inadequacy does not necessarily have to be colocated with traditional familial roles. Such a reconfiguration of the Lacanian mirror stage equates less importance to the authoritarian role of the parents in activating an unconscious position of insufficiency and shifts focus towards the figure of the rival, the point of identification from which self-(in)sufficiency is deduced and the point from which social competition originates. It does not matter the role, gender or relation of the rival so long as it is a primordial otherness from which the backwards-working structure of cross-comparing, gauging and summing up of competitive precursor pressures can derive. This is a competitive model that can be seen replicated in *The Walking Dead* in so much as the advent of the apocalypse dissolves social, political, infrastructural

and therefore familial norms to undermine Lacan's (and therefore Freud's) earlier assumption of the nuclear structure of family. Throughout many of the first seasons, a process of erosion can be observed in relation to the family unit. The deaths of Sophia (Maddison Lintz), Beth (Emily Kinney) Lori (Sarah Wayne Callies) and Hershel (Scott Wilson) all represent a gradual erasure of what Deleuze and Guattari would call the 'mommy-daddy-me triangle', the assumed structure of the western capitalist family. It is also worth noting that *The Walking Dead's* spin off series, *Fear The Walking Dead* (2015-present) also features a dysfunctional family unit of Madison (Kim Dickens) and Travis (Cliff Curtis), mother and father and Nick (Frank Dillane) and Alicia (Alycia Debnam-Carey), brother and sister, who are gradually killed off, all failing to survive the first four seasons (with the exception of Alicia). What comes into view once the family unit is fractured and broken down is both a group survival mentality but also an individualistic survivalism best encapsulated by Shane's (Jon Berental) character. In the apocalyptic state of the world the familial prerequisite of the Oedipus complex is too specific and possibly even utopian. Shane's role within the Grimes family when Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) returns to the group is the epitome of the mirror stage rival, the competitive rivalry that displaces the Oedipus complex in a post-apocalyptic society. It is from this that means of protection, providing food, shelter, medical supplies, time with Lori/Carl (Chandler Riggs) are all implicitly fissured by the point of tension (and from then contestation) between the two men. It is argued that it is from this point of tension that Rick's pseudo-mantra "we gotta survive" emerges and garners influence. It may seem contradictory that the spoken-into-being desire to survive can come from the erosion of the family unit that would surely be an incentive to endure through difficult challenges and conditions, however, as has been established in previous chapters with cases of self-sacrifice, in zombie narratives, the legacy of a lost loved one is all too often a pressurised legacy that forces continuation. By this token, it is difficult to understand the pressurised legacy of survival as merely a linear construct that accumulates and crescendos ad infinitum, navigating each obstacle as it comes, always enduring.

This is why the reformulation of the familial model is so important: because it allows for a reframing of the desire to survive as a multidirectional expansive and often cyclical construct that harmonises with Deleuzean/Guattarrian theorisation, locating the desire to survive as an illusion of choice. Therefore, the desire to survive that comes from pressurised death legacies (persisting or else their sacrifice will be in vain!) can be analysed both in terms of its origin, its episodic fluctuations and its stagnation and eventual manifestation as choices of non-choices.

Deleuze and Guatarri attack the family unit and the Oedipus complex in no uncertain terms, noting its role in the institutionalisation of society and outlining its role as a starting point for the wholescale repression of the masses. They hold that:

> The fact is, from the moment that we are placed within the framework of Oedipus—from the moment that we are measured in terms of Oedipus — the cards are stacked against us, and the only real relationship, that of production, has been done away with. (Deleuze and Guatarri 1983: 24)

What is 'done away with' is the productive power of the unconscious, the idea that desire can be a productive force between communities, countries ideologies and geographies. This is because the familial triangle is a system of repression to Deleuze and Guatarri and the notion that desire can originate from a point of repression represents a misunderstanding of its productive faculties. The Deleuzean/Guatarrian reading of the origin or production of desire is particularly important to this chapter because it can be used to make sense of what the desire to survive means in contemporary socio-political climates; the change to episodic zombie narratives makes this so because it changes from an exponential pressurisation (as seen in filmic texts) to a mesh of survival drives that fluctuate, circulate and manifest in (episodic) actions and agendas. This leads to an apparent second

theoretical dissonance between Lacan and Deleuze: the origin of desire. At this point it is worth noting that Lacanian and Deleuzo-Guattarrian desiring theory is not as polarised as it might appear at first glance. Daniel W. Smith contends that *'Anti-Oedipus* is, from start to finish, a reading of Lacan' and that even though it is known as a critique of Freudian and Post-Freudian psychological theory, '*Anti-Oedipus* does not contain a single negative comment about Lacan' (Smith 2004: 639). This is substantiated by Smith's claim that Deleuze contributed to the Lacanian field 'a whole new set of concepts to describe the inverse side of the symbolic structure (2004: 648). By this logic, the Lacanian imaginary and symbolic orders are means of attempting to access the unsignifiable real; whereas Deleuze flips this on its head and starts with the real as desiring production with the symbolic and imaginary orders secondary products of a subjectivity organised around the Freudian model of repressed desire (Caldwell 2009: 24). This means to access the real in episodic form in relation to self-sacrifice and survival, the Deleuzo-Guatarrian inversion of the Lacanian model is helpful. The relationship to Lacanian theory, and therein self-sacrifice, comes from a point of ambiguity in the mirror stage as recognised by Bert Olivier who suggests that

> As in the case of the infant at the stage of its alienating identification with its "own" mirror image, objects, in the "shifting field" of quotidian experience, lack the ostensible "permanence" or substantiality attributed to them by the subject through this psychically (and ontologically) constitutive gesture of "stagnation". (2014: 53)

What is suggested here is that the misrecognition of coherent identity at the Mirror Stage sets up a relationship to the everyday by which objects appear permanent in conjunction with the subject's cohesive illusion of self. Yet, when the alienating fragmentation of this unitary whole emerges, objects are called into question, becoming fleeting apparitions of subjectivity. It is this misrecognition and alienation that creates a shift in perspective and allows for a coalignment with

Deleuze and Guattari. Olivier recognises a mutual recognition of experiential flux (2014: 53) that matches up with the inverted structure of the Real and the flow of and through desiring machines. This works because the subject's recognition of self-lack is erroneous and based on the assumption that a whole continuous self can exist. Therefore, what the subject would correctly recognise, beyond the symbolic order is the productive flow of desire that moves through the subject causing the misrecognition of lack. This is significant for a number of reasons: it means that analyses of the episodic form of *The Walking Dead* can be used to examine self-sacrifice temporally, in a way that justifies the choice of non-choice as a subjective deformation inherited by the structuring of desire in accordance to the stratification of neoliberal society (Deleuze and Guatarri 1983: 28). It also means that the desire to survive can be mapped in such a way that meaning can be derived from an apparently linear structure of overcoming obstacles. Even if the cyclical desire to survive is both productive (narratively motivational) and repressive (successively stagnant), it comes to the same conclusion as Lacanian *Mise en Abyme* in film in that it repeatedly returns to static social hierarchies that are organised in such a way that the upper echelons become more entrenched in accordance to their profit. The introduction of Deleuze and Guattari allows the desire to survive to be read not as the removal of choice or its eternal reduplication but as a succession of non-choices that connects episodic zombie narratives to the neoliberal organisation of social conditions.

If a Lacanian framework allows the detailed examination of subjective social patterns in zombie films, Deleuze and Guattari provide a way in to understanding, through episodes of *The Walking Dead'*s world-building techniques, how the nature of subjectivity (and therefore desire and identity) is an organised repression that is 'the art of the dominant class' (1983: 28). How this relates to self-sacrifice and the desire to survive in *The Walking Dead* can be summarised in the following. The change to episodic form means that self-sacrifice, as it occurs in the episodic zombie narrative, makes a shift from an exponentially pressuring legacy that implores forward movement to a legacy

that is spread over a much wider timeframe, that exists alongside both diegetic and extradiegetic interruptions (as will be explored further into this chapter). Because of this the legacy dilutes and is eventually replaced by another similarly existing sentiment within the apocalyptic narrative world. Naturally, this sentiment will have something to do with survival and that is why self-sacrificial legacy can be said to fluctuate in accordance with the desire to survive. Moreover, the desire to survive is desire and not need because it is internalised by the self-sacrificial token to the point that their desire to survive is projected through the remaining survivors. It is, therefore, the desire to survive that becomes the product of self-sacrifice in *The Walking Dead*. Survival is returned to from self-sacrifice in a way that represents a stagnation in so much as self-sacrifice in the name of survival can only ever lead to more survivalist drives. This idea rewrites the temporality of self-sacrifice in a sense that it is no longer a simultaneously forward and backward projecting temporal dialectic (as seen with previous chapter's filmic examples) but a cycle that drives the multiplicitous structure of episodic form yet at the same time always ensuring that survival, indicative of a choice of non-choices will resurface. However, the choice of non-choice would appear to represent something of a blockage in the systems of desiring production and flow outlined in *Anti-Oedipus*. As opposed to the body without organs as understood as an interruption to the flow of desire, yet 'crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by gradients marking the transitions and the becomings…' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 19), this blockage must be reformulated. This is because the body without organs is a sterile moment that is nothing and everything all at once; it is the possibility of every varied interaction across the network of desiring machines of the Real in a momentary pause. The choice of non-choices is entirely bereft of such potentiality, it purports such possibility only to engender stagnation. Unlike the body without organs, which it opposes, the choice of non-choices in the guise of the desire to survive is an overwhelmingly active moment that removes all of the potentialities that the body without organs definitively engenders. And yet the choice of non-choices is productive to an extent because

of its first component of false choice. To appease this apparent production of non-production, choice of non-choice, an extract from *The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious* will be assistive. Lacan sees metaphor as a coming into being through absence, a supposed middle ground between Deleuzean/Guatarrian desiring production and Freudian repressed desire. Lacan observes '[b]ut if, in this profusion, the giver disappears with the gift, it is only to reemerge in what surrounds the figure of speech in which he was annihilated' (2006: 423). To understand the desire to survive in *The Walking Dead* and orbital world-narratives, a kind of loophole needs to be inserted into the Deleuzian theory: It is proposed that the production of a negative value or absence is a nuance that should be worked into this theory to add tensile stability. Indeed, textual self-sacrifice might be the best example of this addition in action because the desire to survive is internalised by the self-sacrificial victim to the point that the survival of others takes all priority. It is also a hierarchical relationship by which the failure to survive of the sacrifice further cements the remaining survivor's status as enduring. The distribution of this lack/legacy does however dissipate with the succession of episodes and extra-filmic time to the point that it needs to recur before its meaning becomes socially ingrained. Indeed, that the self-sacrificial legacy dissipates in long-form episodic structures means that the move to a Deleuzian framework is all the more justified; it is just that self-sacrificial legacy is replaced with other ways of framing the desire/choice to survive. To outline this, the following section will engage in a schizoanalysis of Otis' 'self' sacrifice with a view to tying the desire to survive to neoliberal means of repressing subjectivity and reinforcing the stratified social hierarchies.

7.2. Self-sacrifice in The Walking Dead with Emphasis on Episodic Structure

In order to unpack the previously discussed contradiction, a schizophrenic (by the logic of Deleuze and Guattari) reading of self-sacrifice as it occurs in the episodic structure of *The Walking Dead* will be consulted. It must also be acknowledged that *The Walking Dead* is an extensive series with

hours of content. The selection of a sequence to study out of extensive bodies of audiovisual material is something that many scholars of television studies have to navigate. In choosing a moment that not only resonates with the selected theoretical frameworks but also has lasting effects on the entire series, the justification of the following sequence selection will become even more clear as analysis is carried out. The upcoming section of analysis will focus on Shane's (Jon Berental) sacrifice of Otis (Pruitt Taylor Vince) in S2 Ep3, drawing on the notion that the schizophrenic has no notion of whole self and that legacy becomes pressurised, regardless of its reality, through Otis' funeral scene. It must first be noted that Shane and Otis begin their expedition to a nearby school in S2 Ep2 with the escape coming in S2 Ep3 and Otis' funeral in S2 Ep4. They set off to the high school in search of medical supplies to assist with possibly life-saving surgery performed by Hershel on Carl. The point at which Shane regards himself in the mirror with the shower running is shortly after he returns with the medical supplies to tell the rest of the group that Otis sacrificed himself so that Shane could escape. An extreme closeup positions Shane's eyes in a frame that is yet to be verified as a mirror image. A cut transports to the school as Shane and Otis limp away from a large crowd of 'walkers' before returning to Shane's watchful gaze and a cut that confirms his reflection in the mirror. This sequence continues to oscillate between footage of Shane's sacrifice of Otis at the school and Shane shaving the hair from his head, all the while contextualised by the claim that Otis sacrificed himself. It is for this reason that this 'self'-sacrifice is contended to be schizophrenic in a Deleuzean/Guatarrian sense. In *Anti-Oedipus*, they distinguish the schizophrenic from the clinical use of the word (Olivier 2014: 47) labelling the schizophrenic as 'the universal producer' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 7) who does not distinguish between product and process. For Deleuze and Guattari, 'the schizo liberates a raw genealogical material, nonrestrictive, where he can situate himself, record himself, and take his bearings in all the branches at once, on all sides' (1983: 77). This same process is in operation with the sequence that details Shane's sacrifice of Otis; it is a production of images he wills into existence, the recollection of his

experience at the school. It becomes a dialogue of recollections and perspectives in parallel, bleeding into each other and interrupting his deep-seated stare into the mirror. Narrative realities intersect and overlap as the news is spread of his successful return and Otis' heroic sacrifice, conflicting with his myriad of represented and unrepresented states of mind. Whilst it could be argued that this scene is a representation of Shane shaving his head as a physical manifestation of guilt, something more complex is being initiated. Deleuze and Guatarri maintain that schizophrenia is a hallucinatory state by which the production of an image seals its Real validity through the process of producing it. It is also devoid of any notion of a whole and cohesive self-hood. By this logic, Shane's 'self'-sacrifice complies to the Deleuzean/Guattarian notion of schizophrenia in that he makes no distinction between the sacrifice of himself or that of Otis. He watches his reflection and sees the sacrifice looking back at him, without guilt or judgement, merely the process of actualising fragments of lived experience in and around the mirror image. The first two shots that depict him as a reflection leave no indication that he is viewed through the proxy of the mirror, no actualisation of a process of reproduction that is there and therefore no sense of selfhood regarding the self as an outside party. The mirror images exist outside of the influence of the mirror and it is only the process of looking back that brings them into being.

The temporal oscillation between past and present is noticeably divergent from other forms of self-sacrifice examined up until this point. The viewer realises the temporal movement from the establishment of the narrative context and the attention afforded to Shane's missing clump of hair, torn from his head as he struggled with Otis for the medical supplies. This return also represents a cycle of spatial and temporal deletion that reassembles and reactivates the unfolding of the present moment in parallel to the events that took place at the school; Shane recalls what he did with a vividness that renders it inseparable from his immediate surroundings. This kind of parallel schizoid production of images becomes more easily understandable if the 'self'-sacrifice is understood from

the framework of Lacan's mirror stage. Lacan maintains that, for the subject, the mirror stage 'turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented body image [...] to the finally donned armour of alienating identity [...]' (Lacan 1949:78). Self-sacrifice with a non-schizophrenic subject generates fantasies of insufficiency that culminate in sufficiency but also their own self-destruction; there is a dissonance between the reflection (or Ideal I) and their fragmented subjectivity. Shane as the schizophrenic subject goes out of his way to bring on the fragmented reality, he embraces alienation in shaving his head. He hides the bald patch that ties him to his actions, intentionally creating a discrepancy between his model of subjective self (head shaving) and in the process removes the traces of the reason he still exists as an unnerving byproduct of survivalist surplus. It is this that makes this schizophrenic self-sacrifice exceptional in that the sacrifice initiator stands alive in a mirror image. All other sacrifices covered until now have generated their legacy through a perceived absence and resultant exponential pressure that builds (through a negative value). This self-sacrifice generates its legacy through production and not absence (through a positive value) and it will be argued that this is so because of *The Walking Dead's* episodic form. This assertion is evidenced by how, with each character death, successive seasons will repopulate film worlds with characters from beyond the social boundaries already set up in *The Walking Dead*. In stark contrast, the filmic zombie text ordinarily consists of a prolonged whittling whereby the climax of the film involves singular, or just a handful of, characters in comparison to what they started with. But there is more to it than this productive replenishment of walker-fodder through successive seasons. With the convergence of the horde, Otis becomes, in more ways than one, the body without organs, the point of interruption that brings forth transverse connections between desiring machines, providing medical supplies, a decoy for Shane, hope for Lori, tools for Hershel. Each of these sacrificial products generate subsequent reproductions whose repercussions are felt throughout seasons of the series and numerous hours of airplay. Carl survives, Shane's subsequent conflict with Rick redefines Rick's characteristic values; each product is the fulfilment of a micro-goal that can be

understood in a Deleuzean/Guattarian sense as the linking and subsequent reconnection of desiring machines. Otis' death is the interruption, the underlying fragmented foundation upon which all of these consequent foundations are built. By this logic it makes sense that Otis' enforced sacrifice is a body without organs as its 'smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface' (1983: 8) generates real and potential counterproductions that could recede and fall away if the artifice of the original 'self'-sacrifice is revealed. Crucially, this slippage does not occur. Otis' absence is eternally covered over by other productions that shape and transmute his sacrificial legacy. The notion of self-sacrifice as a means of schizophrenic production is inherently paradoxical. This is why the production of absence is called for when analysing Deleuze and Guatarri's writings on desiring production in relation to self-sacrifice. A helpful way of understanding the paradox of schizophrenic self-sacrifice as production comes as Deleuze and Guattari consider Lacan's take on structure as an inverted statement on the productive (positive) Real, a film negative in relation to the developed picture. Deleuze and Guattari clarify that

> This reverse side [of structure] is the "real inorganization" of the molecular elements: partial objects that enter into indirect syntheses or interactions, since they are not partial (partiels) in the sense of extensive parts, but rather partial ("partiaux")* like the intensities under which a unit of matter always fills space in varying degrees (the eye, the mouth, the anus as degrees of matter); pure positive multiplicities where everything is possible, without exclusiveness or negation, syntheses operating without a plan, where the connections are transverse, the disjunctions included, the conjunctions polyvocal, indifferent to their underlying support, since this matter that serves them precisely as a support receives no specificity from any structural or personal unity, but appears as the body without organs that fills the space each time an intensity fills it; signs of desire that compose a signifying chain but that are not themselves signifying, and do not answer to the rules of a linguistic game of

> chess, but instead to the lottery drawings that sometimes cause a word to be chosen, sometimes a design, sometimes a thing or a piece of a thing, depending on one another only by the order of the random drawings, and holding together only by the absence of a link (nonlocalizable connections), having no other statutory condition than that of being dispersed elements of desiring-machines that are themselves dispersed! (1983: 309)

The schizophrenic self-sacrifice offers both inversions of structure; it actualises the symbolic lack with the death of Otis (a fantasy that is real) that is reversed through Shane's telling of the event (a real that is fantasy) and the consequent waves of production and reproduction. Otis' 'self'-sacrifice generates productive legacies that are 'indifferent to their underlying support' and Shane's actions become Otis' because they serve 'pure positive multiplicities where everything is possible, without exclusiveness or negation' (1983: 309). Even if Otis's death represents a lack concealed by the multiplicities conveyed by Shane's recount of events, the concealed absence contradicts Deleuzean/ Guattarian assertions of non-existent 'exclusiveness or negation' precisely because it is from this negative that its products expand from. It therefore follows that Otis as the body without organs, an interruption inclusive of every version of his existence is also an inclusion of every viable iteration of his non-existence and the consequent production of desire that goes with it. This is the paradox of the schizophrenic self-sacrifice and it has a significant effect on the production of self-sacrificial legacy because it is shaped by its products in such a dominant manner but also because this process of shaping occurs over longer episodic time-frames. Deleuze references Lacan's symbolic chain, recognising that it is at its most articulate as a series of dispersed desiring machines (1983: 309). In the case of self-sacrifice, the signifying chain acts as a means of connecting and contextualising the self-sacrifice within a closed loop, with its Real meaning exposed in the repetition of the trope. With a schizophrenic 'self'-sacrifice as seen with Shane and Otis, it is proposed that it generates a legacy different to that of the filmic self-sacrifice. Instead of reproducing a cumulatively intensified

survival pressure, a fluid, transmutational survival pressure is generated, swapping and displacing its products with other iterations of 'self'-sacrificial legacy dependent on how far the narrative has progressed temporally. This claim is substantiated by Otis' link to Carl's survival but also to Rick's eventual death in a way that is unlikely to be remembered; few viewers would remember Otis' name by the time Rick meets his demise in season 9 (8 years later in 'real time') and yet it is likely that Otis' sacrifice shaped Rick's relationship with Shane and ultimately caused Rick to take on the desire to survive narrative, changing his personality markedly. But this forgotten process also takes place through the production of an absence. In other words, Shane not killing Otis may have spared the confrontation of Rick and Shane, and Rick not killing Shane when he does may have changed Rick's eventual resting place because of the change in his character after he kills his once-friend. Each of these events are linked to the legacy of self-sacrifice because it demonstrates how this legacy changes when applied to episodic form: the legacy of self-sacrifice in *The Walking Dead* does not cumulatively pressurise because the schizophrenic nature of Otis' 'self'-sacrifice but also because of its long-form timeframe; over prolonged periods of time any pressure would grow beyond stability, to the point of collapsing. Instead, legacy exists in this form as a constantly dissipating but reconfiguring force that reappears in multiple productive forms (as seen with the production of supplies leading to friendships and then to rivalries in Otis' relation to Rick's death). This means that legacy can exist across longer time frames and its emphasis changes from pressurised accumulation to productive change.

At this point it will be helpful to examine, in detail, some of the ways that legacy of Otis' 'self'-sacrifice circulates around the desire to survive over longer periods of narrative time. The example of Rick's self-sacrifice in S9 Ep5 articulates this tendency of self-sacrificial legacy over longer periods of narrative time eloquently. Starting with the legacy of Otis' self-sacrifice that is told by Shane as a lie to the group, the following series of related survival-centric events are traceable to

Rick's eventual end. Shane, until his death is the character who is primarily concerned with remaining strong and surviving, it is only with his death, and the acts leading up to it, that Rick can supplant him as the foremost proponent of survival. This is perhaps the most direct example of the desire to survive stemming from self-sacrificial legacy and circulating around the group. Because Rick is the group's charismatic leader, they take on his values; as can be seen in S5 Ep9 when they agree to cut off Tyreese's (Chad Coleman) arm to prevent his infection from spreading. Although Tyreese eventually succumbs to the injury there are other examples of this kind of survivalist mentality that has grown within the group. In S5 Ep15 Rick and Carol conspire to steal guns from the lockup in Alexandria, where their confiscated firearms are being held and Rick later points out that the settlement is soft and must accept that they must do what it takes to survive. Carol, who goes from being a meek house-wife in an abusive relationship to, in S4 Ep3, admitting to Rick that she had euthanised two members of the group to stop the spread of a virus, internalises the desire to survive in making this decision. She is then exiled by Rick as a punishment for this logic, demonstrating that Carol had taken on the survivalist narrative before it had fully been realised on Rick's part. Further evidence that her position advocates Rick's outlook can be observed in S4 Ep14 as Carol executes Lizzie (Brighton Sharbino) a young girl in her care because Carol fears she is a danger to the rest of the group. Lizzie had shown signs of being worryingly sympathetic to the 'walkers', feeding them in earlier episodes before eventually killing her sister Mika (Kyla Kenedy) so she could become a walker too. This valuing of survival ultimately becomes a repetitive process because survival necessitates enduring. When it comes to Rick's self-sacrifice in S9 Ep5, he is leading a vast herd of walkers away from Alexandria over a bridge which he expects to give out under their weight. Along the way he is impaled by a rebar and struggles to keep ahead of the herd. Visions of Shane and Hershal (Scott Wilson) provide visual callbacks to to his conflicts with his ex-friend that have somewhat convolutedly led rick to the scenario he is in presently. This illustrates a long and diffuse kind of hallucinatory survival pressure by which Shane and Hershal spur Rick on

as he passes in and out of consciousness. As he leads the zombie horde away from a certain area, this self-sacrifice fits with this study's categorisation of a decoy-based self-sacrifice. Rick embodies the bait that leads the zombie horde over the bridge and the onrushing water below. The collective weight of the walkers is, to Rick's dismay not enough to collapse the bridge. Rick is still struggling with his injury but proximal walkers are taken out by Daryl (Norman Reedus) who is taking aim in a nearby thicket. This buys Rick enough to to spot a walker knock over a box of dynamite. Rick shoots the dynamite resulting in the destruction of the bridge and for many of the walkers on the bridge to be washed away. The shots of the explosion and the walkers, pushed by the masses further behind in the crowd, dropping into the river, their bodies in flames, corresponds to the decoy -based tendency to gauge the efficacy of the sacrifice in the number of zombies eliminated. This self-sacrifice also demonstrates examples of separation-based self-sacrifice with the close up and medium shots of Michonne (Danai Gurira) and Daryl in despair as Rick is engulfed in the blaze. The emotional component of this self-sacrifice is appropriate because the sacrificed character has been central to the narrative from the very beginning. This is another example of self-sacrifice in an episodic zombie narrative gaining enriched meaning from other episodes in its series, specifically each of the ones that have included Rick prior to this moment, each one is an indicator of the deeper significance that this sacrifices takes on because it involves Rick. Moreover, along with the visual recollections of Shane that appear to be in place to remind viewers of characters and events that have taken place dozens of episodes ago, the forward-facing aspect of this self-sacrifice is also resonant. Many of the shots that depict Rick, the bridge, the dynamite and the walkers have a depth of field that establishes depth, there is clear visual information there that determines that, when Rick shoots the dynamite, although he might be caught on the edges of the blast, it is unlikely to prove fatal. This sets up a dissonance to the sequence that makes many of the character's immediate acceptance of Rick's demise seem pessimistic. It also leaves enough space to reintroduce Rick later in the narrative reducing the finality of the sacrifice and simultaneously making it a circulation of

survival legacy. It certainly seems fitting that Rick Grimes would survive his own self-sacrifice. At the end of this episode, six narrative years later, Judith Grimes (Cailey Flemming) is pictured helping a group of survivors fend of a horde of walkers. She is seen wielding Rick's Revolver and Michonne's katana. The weapons are a physical manifestation of legacy, Judith carries the characteristic armament of her father and the short viewing time (within one episode) and the long narrative time (six years) are contrasted in the pairing of this character and item. Michonne's katana is also relevant here because, in S10 Ep13, it is Michonne who finds Rick's boots and phone and then sets off to find more information on his current whereabouts. Each of these links that connect the legacy of Rick's self-sacrifice also can be traced back to how Rick's showdown with Shane changed the teleology of his character and how Shane's sacrifice of Otis began to disintegrate Shane's position in the group.

Consequently, even though the notion of a reconstituting, transverse legacy is better suited to the seasonal, episodic form of *The Walking Dead*, it does engender a degree of erosion. At this point it is worth pointing out that Otis' 'self'-sacrifice is one of the first mentions of self-sacrifice in a series that breaks with the filmic convention of repeated self-sacrifice. Moreover, as the series progresses, examples of clear cut self-sacrifice are comparatively hard to outline (*Train to Busan* contains three definitive self-sacrifices which is more than *The Walking Dead* has in its first 5 seasons). This adds a great deal of importance to the identification of Shane's sacrifice of Otis as schizophrenic because it adds even greater significance to each of the produced events that are generated as a legacy, even if they do not last long in the memory of the viewer. It therefore fits that there is a certain irony to the funeral of Otis. The sequence that represents the funeral is dedicated to the memory of a noble but largely forgettable character whose greatest achievements are required to be forgotten in order for them to acquire their eventual resonance in subsequent seasons. This further elucidates the nature of the schizophrenic self-sacrifice in *The Walking Dead.* With each transformation of the

self-sacrificial legacy, a hypostatic desire ties together every eventual and implied eventual fluctuation, every possible eventuality as a direct or indirect consequence of Otis/Shane's actions and replicates itself through the thrust of the narrative and each character's actions as the desire to survive. To understand how the desire to survive operates and takes place differently to zombie texts in filmic form, the various temporalities of episodic form and quotidian neoliberal experience must be further investigated.

7.3. Temporal Analyses and their Critical Context

It has been established that the examination of productive self-sacrifice in episodic zombie texts generates legacy in a different way to filmic variations; shifting from a cumulative pressure to survive (filmic) to a fluid ever-changing mesh of eventualities (from conversations to 'supply runs' to changes in character's personalities to new characters that replace the dead) that stagnate and return to a desire to survive (episodic). Moreover, this change comes about because of a change in form and bestows a schizophrenic quality to the content because of this change. As it has also been established, the alteration of form imposes a correspondent change in diegetic temporality but this change also extends to extradiegetic temporalities. As it will become clear, changes to both temporalities (diegetic and extradiegetic) have significant effects on the generation and operation of self-sacrificial legacy. The link between form and temporality is founded on the assertion that prolonged narratives require episodic breaks between episodes and seasons. This assumption is rightly challenged by Sidney Eve Matrix who notes that '[w]hen all episodes of a season were released simultaneously, these shows inspired widespread marathon viewing sessions'(2014: 119). The instantaneous release of entire seasons perhaps serves to pronounce intermissions between seasons but also introduces the timeframe of binging. This poses two further extradiegetic distinctions: between streaming on services (such as Netflix and NowTV) or watching *The Walking Dead* live on AMC at the time of airing but also between staying up to date with the episodic

releases from the outset or, as would be the case with the majority of viewers, joining the viewership at some point along the series' nine year duration. Each variation, or different combinations of each variation (it is possible that viewers could commit to a combination of both the previously detailed distinctions) would harbour a different temporal experience for each viewer; it could be the case that this is true only incrementally so, yet, nonetheless the extradiegetic temporality would be altered. A viewer who has started watching *The Walking Dead* in 2019 would have a very different experience to one starting with the release of the first episode. Other temporal delays (and therefore contrasting experiences) include breaks in viewership for reasons other than release dates and viewerships that trailed off. Moreover, encounters with different strains of content on the Internet and different social media sites allow for the generation of timelines in between, before or after episodes (Matrix 2014: 123). If each viewing generates an incrementally different extradiegetic timeline, it also fits that breaks between episodes are configured differently and therefore alternately to a further extent when online content becomes a factor. Naturally, feature films can be paused and interrupted but because of their comparatively self-contained structure, their extradiegetic timelines offer variation to a lesser degree. What is supposedly generated from the presumed breaks in viewership is the impression of choice which is true to the extent that the viewer can decide to watch/not watch; yet, the eventual path remains predetermined (by episodic content) revealing these breaks in viewership to be a non-choice appearing as a linear choice. The point here is that the viewership consumes a fragmented diegetic timeline and can choose to fragment it to a lesser degree (with binging) or not. This leads to an extradiegetic temporality that is founded in a state of flux and therefore incompatible with the legacy of self-sacrifice that accumulates survival pressures. The pressurised legacy that outlines a *Mise en abyme* of sequential self-sacrifice builds because of the pacing of the film and the assumption that it is a self-contained unit with borders to project beyond. Not only are these borders, as representative of final end points, non-existent with *The Walking Dead* (because, like survivalism, it never ends) its internal

segmentations of diegetic and extradiegetic (through the viewer) are endlessly configured, reconfigured and produced through alternating modes of viewership. The result is that the pressurisation does not occur as legacy because it is resigned to either outgrow the narrative to the point of collapsing in on itself or fizzle out between extra diegetic delays. In this case it is the productive legacy of schizophrenic self-sacrifice that allows the episodic form to generate a legacy that is flexible enough to span all possible configurations of diegetic and extradiegetic temporalities (all breaks and resumptions of viewing) in produced actions and reactions. This is not because they are more memorable (in many cases the erasure of the root cause of the self-sacrificial legacy aids its transference as seen with Otis' self-sacrifice) but because each product stagnates and outlines the insistent return to the desire to survive which exists as a cross-section for every action within the series; the lifeblood of each action and interaction crystalises in the form of Rick's mantra: 'we gotta survive'. This is significant because it is the most pronounced representation of the desire to survive which can be understood as a frequent and overdetermined narrative fetishisation of survival. It is no longer about living or dying; the desire to survive is a stagnation of every eventuality produced by self-sacrifice in episodic form. This is because it is a pressurised choice of non-choices; it is not that it is a necessary forward movement but that it is impossible to do anything else and yet the act of surviving delivers a liberation that comes from taking the only option available. The result of this is that the desire to survive positions survival as a choice of non-choices in such a way that it reveals that this very same social scenario is demanded culturally by the neoliberal organisation of time and misinterpretation of social values. For example, breaks in viewership between episodes, as has already been established, offer a linear non-choice by which the viewer can choose to proceed or not proceed. It is the organisation of time around these breaks where an apparent greater degree of choice can be actualised. However, because episodic form mimics the structure of the desire to survive (in that, as there is always one more episode/season, there is always one more obstacle to survive), the illusion of choice that survival presents is carried

over to these temporal breaks in extradiegetic time, revealing the alignment of the recurrent desire to survive and episodic form to be symbiotic choices of non-choices. If the viewership shares in this feeling of liberation that comes with frequently, yet partially, fulfilling the desire to survive, it fits that the previously described social fetishisation of survival has taken up a normative position in neoliberal culture through choices of non-choice. Following this statement to its logical conclusion, it seems more than coincidental that neoliberal politics is becoming frequently reliant on post-truths and the incentive of democratic choice as a motivation for self-gratification or political survival. It is fitting that the same desire to survive narratives can be applied to their non-fictional hypostases.

Further insight into the relationship between neoliberalism and the desire to survive can be gained by examining the temporal patterns of self-sacrificial legacy, the desire to survive and episodic form in greater detail. To recap, the Lacanian temporal dialectic operates as follows:

> The tubule and assumption of his specular image by the kind of being – still trapped in his motor impotence and nurseling dependence – the little man is at the *infans* stage this seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as the subject. (Lacan 1949: 95)

This way of understanding self-sacrifice needs some alteration when addressing the change in the legacy of self-sacrifice that comes with a change of form. With self-sacrifice in episodic form, the individual is projected futuristically as their productive faculties transmute into different iterations of the desire to survive. This means that the produced temporality can be fragmented constantly but still make sense with the return to the desire to survive. This is why it is still worthwhile to consult

Lacanian theory at this point: because that return, the insistence of the desire to survive articulates a stagnation within the productive legacy of self-sacrifice. This means that the desire to survive is cyclical and, in circulating, demonstrates the proliferation of choices of non-choice. This is to be understood as the repeated recognition of insufficiency from the ideal self that is incorporated into a mindset constituting a cyclical verification of alienated identity. It is proposed that the projections of survival characterise an ideal version of the self that occupies the same position as the ideal self of the mirror stage. Therefore, not only is the repetition of the desire to survive a stagnation of identity (via Lacanian insistence), but also the act of measuring oneself through the lens of an act consisting definitively of a choice of non-choices. Moreover, the cyclical nature of the desire to survive helps elucidate how it is both endlessly producing in the connection of desiring machines (in a Deleuzean/Guattarian sense) but also able to return or insist in a Lacanian sense (as production folds and coils around and back on itself). Such cyclical nature is what is able to locate the desire to survive as each season's primary thrust even in fragmented or interrupted extradiegetic viewership patterns as discussed previously. This is also why this kind of legacy simultaneously erodes as it reconfigures, forgets as it introduces new characters. As fan-favourites are killed off, it prevents the exponential accumulation of survival pressure (as seen in comparatively self-contained film temporalities) so that survival as a choice of non-choices retains its meaning and consistency even over significantly prolonged periods of narrative time. The illusion of choice is therefore preserved by the schizophrenically productive legacy of self-sacrifice which, in itself has a number of ramifications. It should first be noted that Deleuze and Guatarri understood the schizophrenic desiring production as a means of freeing repressive institutions that have become the norm in late capitalist society. The flow of productions (including simultaneous consumption) and connections of desiring machines allows for what they term 'schizoanalysis' which ultimately liberates the individual from political institutions, corporatism, social class hierarchies and other dominant forces of Capitalism. They maintain that

> The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class. This involves deliberately organizing wants and needs (manque) amid an abundance of production; making all of desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied; and making the object dependent upon a real production that is supposedly exterior to desire (the demands of rationality), while at the same time the production of desire is categorized as fantasy and nothing but fantasy. (Deleuze and Guatarri 1983: 28)

The schizophrenic is capitalism's 'exterminating angel. He (sic.) scrambles all the codes and is the transmitter of the decoded flows of desire' (1983: 35). If desires and demands of society are organised to reinforce the position of the wealthy and influential, the schizophrenic reconfigures these organised wants into simultaneous production, the flow of connecting and uncoupling desiring machines. The relative disorganisation of this succession of flows, interruptions and cycles has already been aligned to the expansive structure and the limited interactivity that comes from the experience of viewing schizophrenic self-sacrifice as productive in *The Walking Dead*. Herein lies a paradox by which each product of Shane's schizophrenic self-sacrifice, according to Deleuze and Guattari, should prove a schizophrenic means of dispelling the influence of trickle-down-economy capitalism, a scrambling of the capitalist code. Instead, each product, each produced eventuality or reaction is centred on the desire to survive and therefore a choice of non-choice that, as established in the previous section, defines the modern neoliberal condition because it is ubiquitous to the extent that it has become a subliminal expectation.

7.4. Adding Critical Context to Temporal Analysis of *The Walking Dead*

To further nuance Deleuze and Guattari's notions of desiring production and multiplicities in regards to the television series, Raymond Williams offers a rhetoric that is noticeably compatible with Deleuze and Guattari's work: television as flow. Williams notes

> It may be even more important to see the true process as flow: the replacement of a programme series of timed sequential units by a flow series of differently related units in which the timing, though real, is undeclared, and in which the real internal organisation is something other than the declared organisation. (1974: 93)

Here, the process of flow takes the viewer into a different chronology, making them less aware of the passing of time and committing them to a single channel. The changing of channels interrupts not the passing of time but the sense of how much time has elapsed because they may not have been present from its beginning. The conveniences of digital streaming services have somewhat diminished the sense of temporal disorienting that comes from changing a channel. Switching from Netflix to NowTV is perhaps the closest to a modern day equivalent yet both have a readily accessible duration timer at the bottom of the screen so the viewership can see exactly how long they have watched and how long remains. But is this not the direct actualisation of the neoliberal quantification of experience encroaching on the organisation of viewing schedules? The choice is that one can watch anything they please whenever they please but the corresponding non-choice is that it must be on the terms of quantifiable neoliberal productivity and through the platform of corporate broadcasting companies like Sky, Amazon Video or Netflix. Jason Mittell provides an alternative take on the succession of episodes and how narrative chronology can affect viewer temporality. He holds that

> Complex television employs a range of serial techniques, with the underlying assumption that a series is a cumulative narrative that builds over time, rather than resetting back to a steady-state equilibrium at the end of every episode. (Mittell 2015: 18)

The Walking Dead appears to resonate with Mittell's formulations of serial complexity to a degree; it demonstrates a cyclical narrative that resets to points of equilibrium at different points along the narrative whilst holding the desire to survive as the shaper of character development arcs. There is a narrative that builds over time but it repeats itself and reestablishes the desire to survive as its primary momentum. The notion of complexity brings with it the assumption of numerous layers that weave into each other and contribute to this idea of a complex narrative but with *The Walking Dead's* impetus and structure, each survival-driven season writes over the well-worn paths of the last without contributing a further layer of structural nuance. However, Dan Hassler-Forest recognises *The Walking Dead* as a transmedia property and acknowledges the depth and complexity the series gains from its similarities and dissimilarities to the original graphic novel. He points out that '[t]he series thus continuously combines the iconic characters, events and locations from the comic book with its own additions and alterations to the source material' (Hassler-Forest 2014: 133). Whilst the series is offers a transmedia depth that will be addressed by how this thesis covers a range of media narrative, it also structure exhibits degrees of repetition with its cyclical nature. It is for this reason that the legacy of Shane/Otis' 'self'-sacrifice can generate a legacy of a similar structure to its episodes; it is something that is fluid, that leans into the change but is ever-grounded is the cycle that returns to the desire to survive. The legacy of the Shane/Otis self-sacrifice is both changeable and mutable to correspond with the various challenges, dramas, infections, dilemmas and supply runs. Each cycle does not contribute a complexity that in this case would dilute the message; rather it insists with acting survivalism into existence with an irrepressible homogeneity that chants survival to fever-pitch and writes the fetishisation of survival single-mindedly into the

cultural subconscious in a way that few, if any long-form entries into zombie discourse have before it. Yet it would be reductive to treat the structure of *The Walking Dead's* narrative as something that grows only in a linear fashion with the coming of further seasons. This is true in so much that it is an ever expanding narrative world that grows horizontally with new seasons but also vertically with spin off texts that have or will have overlapped, aligning with Deleuze and Guatarri's logic of rhizomatic flow and simultaneous production. The temporalities of the viewing experience only serve to reinforce this alignment in that each one represents a parallel timeframe growing out from a partially interactive narrative timeline. And yet, there are more points of dissonance that converge; each addition to the narrative structure and each additional viewed temporality are realised in terms of the desire to survive as representative of a choice of non-choices. The wealth of productions that can be understood in terms of the Deleuzean/Guatarrian notion of schizophrenic flow are simultaneously subjecting themselves to a subjugation of their own making. Indeed, the viewing experience is indicative of a similar process of 'inward folding' by which the act of viewing *The Walking Dead* is equally an interaction with social media pertaining to the text as well as various encounters with clips, potential spoilers and other user-generated content online. This in itself co-aligns to the Deleuzean/Guattarian flow of multiplicities as experienced in the reality of the desiring subject. And by their metric, this should be a revolution against capitalism, against the precursor tributaries that branch off into neoliberal landscapes. But this is not the case. The modular nature of experiencing aspects of these episodic texts allows episodes to be compartmentalised to fit in with neoliberal schedules that champion quantifiable personal productivity above all else. Matrix concurs with this in observing the following:

> For adult viewers, the choice to spend an evening or a weekend glued to the screen, immersed in consuming multiple episodes or even an entire season of television programs at

> once, is framed as a "guilty pleasure" or a "dirty secret" not unlike gorging on snack food. (2014: 124)

Taking the inverse side of the argument, the binge is at the other end of the spectrum from compartmentalised viewing but the sentiment that ultimately sees the episodic text as secondary to or a distraction from neoliberal narratives of quantified productivity remains. To further contextualise this claim, consider Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the culture industry. They contend that entertainment is produced as a means of sedating the masses through media as '[a]musement congeals into boredom, since, to be amusement, it must cost no effort and therefore moves strictly along the well-worn grooves of association (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 2002: 109). So which approach is it? Is it that binging is a guilty pleasure that gives away neoliberal biases towards quantifiable self-productivity? Or that the generation of popular culture contributes a well-worn path that organises leisure-time into a pattern that engenders a more productive work-time? Or does the production of an episodically structured zombie series occupy a middle ground between the two former questions? It does so whilst incorporating the structural modularity of the episodic text as a means of fitting the text's content around the productive work-time that is prioritised with the assumptions of the culture industry. In other words, the stagnation of the desire to survive is repeated in a modular (episodic) structure when considering the distribution and organisation of leisure time. This fits with the previously explored configuration of the schizophrenic self-sacrificial legacy because each stand-alone episode of *The Walking Dead*, whilst it may not make complete narrative sense in isolation, clearly articulates the desire to survive no matter what the temporal interval that comes (or does not come) as an intermission between episodes. This outlines a repetition of the desire to survive as constitutive of choices of non-choice repeatedly to the point that they resemble Adorno and Horkheimer's 'grooves of association', not only outlining the normative expectation of the illusion of choice, but also the overdetermination of

its representation to the point that it is perceived habitually. Moreover, because a Deleuzo-Guatarrian reading of the narrative's schizophrenic temporality (self-sacrificial and otherwise) is at odds with the desire to survive (that reinforces neoliberal conditions with the enforcement of the illusion of choice), there exists an internal pressure whereby the time leisurely allotted to view the episode is implicitly condemned by the narrative's implicit values. Thereby the viewer's will to continue viewing constitutes a welcome defiance to survivalist (symptomatic of neoliberal) drives whilst simultaneously reinforcing the idea that the decision to continue watching also originates from a point of non-choice. By this logic Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the schizophrenic in reference to episodic structure is incorrect; the schizoid nature of the text and its structure only serves to compound the neoliberal fundament of illusory choice through the desire to survive. It is not a means of reconfiguring the stratification of social class but a way of enforcing it. This deduction can be challenged through Fredric Jameson who returns to Lacan to formulate his definition of the schizophrenic:

> But since the schizophrenic does not know language articulation in that way, he or she does not have our experience of temporal continuity either, but is condemned to live a perpetual present with which the various moments of his or her past have little connection and for which there is no conceivable future on the horizon. In other words, schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the "I" and the "me" over time. (Jameson 2004: 7)

To recap at this point, a change in form, from filmic to episodic, calls for the Deleuzo-Guattarian framework to incorporate the branching and multifaceted structure of *The Walking Dead.* This

changes the operation of self-sacrifice to align with the Deleuzian multiplicity which is schizophrenic by nature. Such schizophrenia carries over to the legacy of the self-sacrifice understood as a transmutational flow of productions that becomes the foundation of the narrative world as it expands. Each eventual production stagnates towards the desire to survive which is revealed to be, through a return to Lacanian rhetoric, a succession of hypostases, that outline a choice of non-choices. Following the schizoid legacy of self-sacrifice which Deleuze and Guattari maintain is a means of decoding and deterritorialising capitalist mechanisms of repression, the return to the choice of non-choice presents an impasse that must be traversed. Jameson provides an alternative. The difference in lexis marks a deviation from Deluze and Guatarri's formulation of schizophrenia; for Jameson, schizophrenia is definitive of the postmodern condition and therefore confining society to the workings of late capitalism as opposed to the liberation that Deleuze and Guattari posit. But it does not suffice to consign the desire to survive to the resignation of postmodern surfaces and the disintegration of meaning and this can be avoided by the following methodology. It is understood that the form and content of *The Walking Dead* consistently engenders the desire to survive which actualises an implicit expectation of choices of non-choice that is both ubiquitous and ingrained in modern neoliberal societies. The form of the text suggests multiplicitous schizophrenic liberation in its ever-becoming and productive causalities that make the contradictory statement of the desire to survive and therefore the illusion of choice, thus causing an impasse. Jameson's notion (following Lacan) that the schizophrenic subject does not recognise the 'persistence of the "I" and the "me" over time' cancels out the futuristically facing aspect of the desire to survive, causing it to break down. The result is that the dissonance between form that follows schizophrenic desiring production and its relation to the illusion of choice is removed. But this is a hollow victory because in this format, the reading infers that all choices are meaningless as the choice of non-choices becomes the non-choice of non-choice. Therefore, reclaiming choice is not about the question of schizophrenic/non-schizophrenic, but, by an ironic counter-formulation of

self-sacrifice in the episodic zombie narrative, instead reliant on the present sacrifice of past and future selves. Jameson's logic can be inverted in so much as one's notion of selfhood through time is not necessarily founded on the perception of past and future selves but on the gradual slippage of the present through time. Therefore, the choice to follow such slippage chimes with both Lacanian, (reconfiguring the temporal dialectic) Deleuzean/Guattarian and Jamesonian (aligning confining and liberating conceptions of schizophrenia) readings of the form of *The Walking Dead* as well as an understanding of Otis' 'self'-sacrifice as desiring production. Now that the notion of choice has been disentangled from the frequent (implicit) articulation of choices of non-choices, the sacrifice of past and future selves can be initiated. However, the limit of the episodic medium has been reached and to be able to further study the relationship between zombie texts, self-sacrifice and neoliberal social conditions in relation to past and future self-sacrifice and the (non)illusion of choice, zombie-shooter video game texts should now be consulted.

7.5. Consulting the Illusion of Choice

In conclusion, the change from filmic to episodic form has a range of implications. A change from Lacanian to Deleuzean/Guattarian theoretical frameworks is required to examine the structure of *The Walking Dead* and its spinoffs as understood as a flow of desiring production, of connections and interruptions that expand organically from each other. A corresponding change comes about with regards to the legacy of self-sacrifice. Instead of the filmic cumulative pressurisation as read through a Lacanian metric, a modular, transformative self-sacrificial legacy comes about in a way that is compatible with the previously mentioned structure of *The Walking Dead.* The meaning of this therefore shifts from a competitive *mise en abyme* to the production of numerous eventualities, all of which stagnate towards the desire to survive. The desire to survive is a label that is referred to when the idea of survival becomes so overdetermined that it ceases to be about life or death. Instead, the desire to survive (returning through Lacanian theory) characterises a symptom that

actualises the neoliberal ubiquity of the illusion of choice. The method and frequency of its portrayal goes on to suggest that it is so ingrained in the social order that it has come to be an expectation of the social unconscious. Moreover, the emergence of the illusion of choice in quotidian experience calls into question the allocation of both personal and work time. This outlines an auxiliary pressure that demands the internalisation of neoliberal productivity in quantifiable units, thus dictating viewing schedules. The Deleuzean/Guattarian position that sees the schizophrenic as a force that can liberate capitalism finds its counterpoint in the application of their schizophrenic framework to the structure of *The Walking Dead* and its spinoffs. Both the legacy of Shane's sacrifice of Otis and the series' structure fit with the schizophrenic definition in *Anti-Oedipus*. Yet, what each transformation of the self-sacrificial legacy implies is the desire to survive and therefore the realisation of a choice of non-choices. This renders Deleuze and Guattari's claims of the schizophrenic as the liberator from the capitalist forces somewhat inconsistent and calls for Jameson's confining yet linguistic take on schizophrenia. Jameson's definition and subsequent analysis makes it clear that in order to understand the illusion of choice, self-sacrifice and their relationship to neoliberal narratives, the medium of the video game must be consulted. By introducing an element of choice to the medium, the illusion of choice can be examined in greater detail. The narrative thrust of *The Walking Dead* and its spinoffs might well exist as a spear through an oncoming zombie's head, but it is the survival drives that demand such frequent brutality and that embody the social hierarchies and political self-interests that positions the dominant class in the perfect place to stab others squarely in the back.

8. *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light*: Finding a Response to Neoliberal Hierarchies

Now that the formation and contextual neoliberal resonances of self-sacrificial legacies over longer serial narratives have been explored, the illusion of choice as a neoliberal fundament becomes the next subject of study. For this reason, the following chapter will examine the illusion of choice in ludic texts comparatively and commence by examining a choice that the narrative imposes and the player was unable to make.

> **Joel**: I struggled for a long time with survivin'. And you— ..No matter what... you keep finding something to fight for. Now, I know that's not what you want to hear right now, but it's—
>
> **Ellie**: Swear to me. *[long beat]* Swear to me that everything you said about the Fireflies is true.
>
> *[Joel hesitates for a long beat]*
>
> **Joel**: I swear.
>
> *[Ellie distances herself for a longer beat. With all hesitation, she looks up to Joel and finally nods]*
>
> **Ellie**: ...Okay.

There have been many interpretations and criticisms of the above final lines of dialogue in *The Last of Us* (2013, Remastered version 2014). Joel's (Troy Baker) rumination on the value of survival underpins a collective inquiry into what to assign such value to. In this case, he survives and fights for Ellie (Ashley Johnson) who has a genetic mutation in her brain that renders her immune to the mutated strain of the *cordyceps* that has brought the apocalypse to the world. The Fireflies are an insurgent group that intend to surgically remove sections of Ellie's brain to formulate a cure for the *cordyceps* virus. The choice of whether to save Ellie, thus entirely negating the possibility of a cure,

or leave her to the Fireflies is made by Joel, consequently removing that agency from the player or Ellie. By this logic, if Joel's survival can be read as a means of usurping choice, his survival-attained agency is also illusory because it necessarily removes it from other agents, like Ellie and the player. This same structuring of survival and agency applies to self-sacrifice because the sacrificed character's decision to sacrifice themselves for other characters is removed and passed on to the surviving group as an illusion of deciding their own fate. It will be contended that self-sacrifice, in this way, encapsulates how the neoliberal agenda manipulates constructions of the illusion of choice by celebrating the liberating agency of one social group that has come into being as a direct consequence of another group's freedom of choice being removed.

> **Mother:** It doesn't matter! Just Listen! You've been breathing the mist! It will take longer, but you are already changing into a monster such as myself!
>
> **Crane:** No…wait …listen!
>
> **Mother:** The army built a fail-safe into their experiment. This entire region can be purified. The question is: are you ready to sacrifice thousands of lives, Kyle - yours among them?

The final act of *Dying Light's* expansion, *The Following* (2016) concludes with a choice: does the player assist the Mother, a powerful and sentient volatile infected, by activating the fail-safe, a nuclear warhead, or resist the Mother and have Crane transform into a 'volatile' himself. This constitutes an illusion of choice seen more frequently with representations of self-sacrifice. Here, there is no way to effectively survive this choice; the warhead ending obliterates the entire region and the resistance ending has Crane slaughter a family as the sun goes down behind the mountains. Purification by nuclear warhead as an ending contributes a remarkable perspective on the illusion of choice and the fetishisation of survival. The ending that resists the Mother is clearly the option that values survival more highly; it allows Crane enough time to become infected and it also allows for

the potential survival of the rest of Harran, however nightmarish that existence may be. The ending that is executed by a nuclear explosion disregards survival, it aligns with the position of the Mother, that their world is beyond saving and must be annihilated. But the game still positions the detonation act as a heroism, a self-sacrifice for the people. The choice of which ending to initiate is given to the player but the Mother lets them know that they are infected in no uncertain terms. Therefore, the preexisting infection positions the self-sacrifice of the nuclear purification ending well within the scope of this study of self-sacrifice. The manner of the sacrifice however questions whether or not anyone is, or can be, saved. Resisting the Mother leads to the death of the player as readily as the nuclear purification ending does. Therefore, the defining criteria of the choice given to the player is how much choice is taken away from the people of Harran. Detonating the nuclear warhead is a wide-scale interception of choice, it takes the player's choice and extrapolates it to the entirety of Harran. Any choice given to the player is displaced by how that choice does or does not remove choice from others. Like *The Last of Us*, the illusion of choice presented to the player is constructed by the hierarchical removal of choice that both predates and follows the input of player choice. This study contends that neoliberal conditions operate by a similar hierarchical removal of choice and that an understanding of interactive/ludic self-sacrifice is essential to elucidating the relationship between the illusion of choice in ludic texts and neoliberal iterations of the illusion of choice.

This chapter will examine configurations of choice in *Dying Light* and *The Last of Us*, unpacking the illusion of choice as it was formulated in the previous chapter and reapplying it to neoliberal deformities of social value. Starting with an exploration of how moving from episodic to interactive media affects configurations of choice, the relation of failure in interactive and ludic texts (Juul 2013, Anable 2014) will be examined in conjunction to neoliberal critiques (Davies 2014). This will be followed by a comparative analysis of the construction of gameworlds in *The Last of Us* and

Dying Light, focussing on the quantification of microcosmic and macrocosmic levels of control and leading into a Deleuzian reading of both gameworld constructions as societies of control. The distinction between choice and control will be made as a means of critiquing Deleuzian theoretical applications but will also provide a segue into the comparative analysis of death/failure cycles that makes up the following section. By comparing how *Dying Light* and *The Last of Us* treat death/ failure in game, notions of cyclical control/non-control can be further nuanced and applied to the relation between in-game failure and the winners/losers narrative perpetuated by neoliberal agendas (Verhaeghe 2014, Anable 2014). This will then be connected to the cumulative, asynchronous manifestations of failure in games (Hancock), with a view to constructing a composite configuration of self-sacrifice that is applicable to interactive and ludic media: a self-sacrifice that is asynchronous, cumulative, collective and nonsequential. This is possible with the understanding that repeated death in a video game can be understood as an incremental learning process that is elevated to a point of asynchronicity when leading to the transgression of an in-game obstacle. Asynchronous, cumulative self-sacrifice will then be positioned as an enriching source of gradual development that provides the defining nuance when compared to the stasis of neoliberally constructed hierarchies. The ingrained winners/loser construction is rightly exposed as a wilful negation of social mobility, stratified by constructions of repeated failure that only reinforce hierarchy and become part of internalised failure-identity (Anable 2014).

In line with this study's literature review, the position of the zombie remains the subject that comes into being through the iteration of its lack of agency. Indeed, the zombie has always been pertinent to the study of self-sacrifice because like the self-sacrificial vector, they are both past the point of being able to make a choice. In many ways, the frequency of zombies, both narratively and culturally, can be read as an accumulation of non-choices that structure and arrange the choices individuals make. Mckissack and May position the zombies in *Left for Dead* in alignment with the

player when they ‘act as a mindless machine of base instinct following a predetermined path’ (2019: 17). For them there is a liberating agency that comes into existence when speed-running (playing through the game as fast as possible, sometimes making use of ‘skips’ and ‘glitches’). This is in complete contrast to the player who takes on the game as the developers intended and, in taking the predetermined path, barely distinguishes themselves from the hordes of zombies they are shooting down. The logic of survival fetishisation positions the zombie as a failure to survive, the necessary and inexorable product of failure. Further into this study, the overlap of these two formulations of the zombie (a product of survival and/or social failure and an agent without agency) will form the question of how the zombie fits into the cumulative asynchronous iteration of self-sacrifice.

8.1. Critical Evaluations of the Illusion of Choice in Ergodic and Interactive Media

The study of configurations of the illusion of choice, self-sacrifice and neoliberal constructs in zombie narratives requires a progression from episodic to interactive media. This is because, in order to elucidate how degrees of choice can operate as an illusion, a medium that has interactivity and playability as its definitive properties must be consulted. That being said, many scholars have noted the close association of horror film, horror and survival-horror games and choice. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywińska note that video games exhibit ‘[a]ssociations with cinema or the cinematic [... that] can be found in games at a variety of different levels’ (2002: 10). Moreover, Bernard Perron identifies that a ‘relation between survival horror games and horror films underlines a central element of play and games, which is repetitiveness (2012: 16). He holds that certain degrees of predictability within an interactive medium is not something that disengages the player; rather it is a structure that both interactive and non-interactive horror texts draw on and subvert. Interactivity does allow for different ways of subverting repeated or recurring structures within the horror genre. Consider the most basic example of this: the encounter with the zombie which is repeated over and over throughout a game or a film. Then consider the different classes of zombies in *The Last of Us*;

the ‘clickers’ offer a considerably different challenge to the ‘bloaters’ discovered later in the game. It is through repetition but also the subversion of reciprocated action and interaction (gameplay) that the nature of play is explored by the player, thus distinguishing the two media. The interactivity that a game can bring is the logical extension of how a horror film (or horror series) can operate, as the exchange of control inputs and stimuli works to organise, ‘intensify and extend the types of emotional and affective experiences offered by the horror film’ (Krzywińska 2002: 13). Interactivity is therefore, not only a definitive component to the video game medium, it is, by extension, a fitting study into modern iterations of the illusions of choice in a medium that is defined in part by the presence of a ‘controller’. Ciara Cremin goes into more detail in the granular composition of ludic interactivity. Following a Deleuzian framework, she argues that the ludo-creator/video game artist provides a canvas on which the ludo-apprentice contributes to through mastering gameplay and growing into the controlled character (2012: 80). Moreover, ‘the canvas of the video game is a ludo-diagram of preprogrammed potentialities caught in the nonspace of the virtual environment, with signifiers that hint at what might happen if we apply force to the canvas’ (Cremin 2012: 80). This actualises the progression from filmic or episodic to interactive texts through the contribution of the player and incorporates the process of incremental learning into what is specifically unique about the interactive medium, an aspect that will be discussed in relation to constructions of survival and failure further into this chapter.

The contextual implications of examining the illusion of choice, survival fetishisation and represented self-sacrifice must also be considered with regards to the interactive element of texts. Habel and Kooyman notice that the ‘more open ended expansive narrative trajectories of horror games and (typically) private settings for game consumption distinguish horror games and gaming experiences from their cinematic counterparts’ (2014: 4). Although this assertion rings true with film and cinema goers to a certain extent, the television series, typically watched at home through

streaming services would likely take on similar conditions of consumption. Moreover, even before the advent of streaming services, the consumption of video games and television both required a television set to view and interact with. That many consoles allow for the installation of streaming services such as Netflix and NowTV manifests this overlap between the consumption media of television and video games. The case has also been made for a greater degree of interactivity present in television than in film (Levine 2008: 395). That being said, with the advent of live streaming gameplay on platforms such as Twitch and watch-along parties stemming from other media-streaming platforms, the private experiences of playing and watching are equally subjectable to online audiences of various sizes. Further, live-streamed gaming broadcasts rarely come without comment feeds that are often utilised as sites of guidance and suggestion to and from viewers. The modes of privately playing video games and influences that affect the player have never been more numerous and fragmented.

Scholarship regarding the playable interactivity of video game texts also highlights how restricting the player is also important to the design of the game and restrictions are therefore also pertinent when it comes to the examination of how illusions of choice can be represented. For example, Krzywinska discusses *Resident Evil 3* in noting that the game

> structures space and the player's experience through editing and fixed framing, which is often used to create shock effects. The intrusive effect of pre-rendered camera angles within gameplay reminds the player that control is limited and that the gameplay is highly predetermined. (2002: 15)

A sensation of fixity intruding on the player's traversal through the gameworld is what highlights the incorporation of the illusion of choice into virtual realities. Following Krzywinska's line of

argument, it is these limitations that partly constitute the experience of play, yet at the same time they suggest an underlying sense of potential liberation that comes from the player not knowing what is coming next. The predetermination of the game code is something that is inescapable, the selection and sequence of choices is finite yet equally dependent on the action of the player. *Resident Evil 3* clearly uses the action of the player and the concomitant levels of player knowledge to its advantage with the use of shock and jump-scares, but this may require the player to have no prior knowledge of the sequence of events or to not have successfully predicted the shock effect from previously recognisable patterns. As will be explored in greater detail further into this chapter, notions of agency, play and player freedom can differ from game to game and person to person. For now, choice can be understood as a limitation that is necessarily constituted by its relation to the underlying level of prior knowledge any player can ever have. This is because choice in this way operates between many instances of players, connecting their experience and expectation through interaction with the game's coding. Cremin proposes that the video game 'is more than the assemblage of the desires of the production studio; it becomes part of an assemblage with the player herself or the many players depending on the video game in question' (2012: 76). The experience of each player is necessarily entwined because it emerges organically from the code of the game which acts as a virtual digital sink in which the collective experiences of every player can be saved and compiled. This construction is particularly applicable to the servers of MMO (massive multiplayer online) games where the instances of each character a player creates (and there can be multiple) are stored in the same digital vault. Cremin's contention points to the initially infinite potentialities of the gaming development studio (2012: 76) and the potentially massive amount of players who eventually play the game, but as Jaroslav Švelch rightly observes the multiplicitous configurations of the horror game are confined to codification (2013: 194). He posits that this leads to 'a new type of monstrosity which follows the principles of informatic control' (Švelch 2013: 195). Because the monster is codified, it can become knowable, in most cases it can be mastered and transgressed and,

as such, the choice of how to overcome or escape can be quantified. As it has been established that the interactive text harbours various multiplicities and potentialities, with the caveat that they must be limited by the running oscillations of code, the illusion of choice stems from the fabric of the interactive text, with the promise of possibility being precluded by potentially vast but limited options. This is true however, to differing degrees (thus allowing for deviations on a text by text basis). The quantification of atrocities or indeed gameworlds provides a necessary inroad to discussing how the illusion of choice relates to both interactive texts and modern iterations of neoliberalism.

8.2. Positioning Video Game Theory and Ludic Approaches to Neoliberal Criticism

The following section will start by assessing social quantification in neoliberal spheres, before tying this tendency to other neoliberal critiques, most notably of failure. It will also cover the hypostases of survival and individualism in apocalyptic reimaginings before moving to Krzywinska's theory of cycles of control and how this can be applied to Deleuzian societies of control. The critiques of neoliberalism that this study has followed so far have started with Verhaeghe and progressed to different readings and observations. For the purpose of consistency, this chapter will progress in a similar manner. Verhaeghe notes the dualism of success and failure in what he terms the neoliberal meritocracy (2014: 76). It is the individual who only has 'themselves to blame for their own failure [...] people can perfect themselves if they try hard enough - perfection being measured in terms of success and power' (Verhaeghe 2014: 76). The damaging aspect of this is that it reifies the hierarchy the winner/loser dichotomy presents. Success or failure is internalised by its recipient and their respective position is reinforced. Moreover, this is a structure that pervades communities, sectors and institutions, including areas in which it is particularly unwelcome: higher education and healthcare (Verhaeghe 2014: 123). Could the notion of neoliberal meritocracy be applied to the previously detailed quantification and codification of virtual worlds? There are a number of reasons

that the meritocracy (understood as a society that rewards individuals based on merit) is both compatible and incompatible with the quantification and codification of gameworlds as previously recognised by Švelch. To a certain extent, the video game can be understood as a series of rewards and punishments based on the skilful action and interaction of the player. In that sense, the notion of meritocracy is applicable to the video game or interactive text. However, the neoliberal meritocracy is, by definition, a flawed system by which nepotism and privilege hold as much (if not more) weight as individual merit. Perhaps the differences between the two meritocratic systems account for the cultural prominence of video games as a collective longing for a genuine meritocracy that is no longer governed by the established constraints of neoliberalism as understood as a front for favouritism, prejudice and the stratification of social class. This reading also sees the apocalyptic and dystopian nature of many games released in the twenty first century, including *Dying Light* and *The Last of Us*, as a visceral and earth-shattering rejection of neoliberal-phase capitalism, in which the player can further contribute to its ruination: an endeavour that ultimately fails to eradicate the individualistic, selfish survival tendencies that both the player and the virtual world cannot forget. William Davies, in line with Verhaghe's argument, outlines the construction of competition as a driving force of the malformed neoliberal agenda. He contends that

> Once we are speaking of these deliberately constructed competitions, and not some existential or biological idea of emergent competition, we get a clearer view of the strange forms of authority which neoliberalism has generated and depended upon. (Davies 2014: 37)

Davies' distinction between biological/existential competition and its constructed variant provides useful insight into how neoliberal authority is generated. In many ways, constructions of social or corporate competition rely on their biological counterparts to cloak their own artifice. This constitutes a double-veiling whereby neoliberalism not only purports to reward merit and instead

looks for decidedly different criteria, (pre-existing wealth, non-minority racial or gender profiles and those who buy into the competitive framework) but also falsely claims to originate from genetics when it actually emerges from the positions of influence that were in place before neoliberalism took root. The illusion of choice, that is in part definitive of the neoliberal problem, stems from the double bind of presenting merit as the illusory success criteria of a meritocracy. The second element of the double bind falsely proclaims constructed forms of competition as inescapable, genetically predetermined states of human nature that are grounds for morally justified conditions of extreme inequality (Davies 2014: 30). Therein lies the assumption that those who are less successful deserve to be less equal because they have not earned the status of success. This incorporation of competition into morality also presents the illusion of choice because it supports the narrative that success and failure (and by extension the winners/losers dichotomy that props up neoliberal social hierarchies) is determined by individual choices when, in reality, it is predetermined by the aforementioned preexisting 'winners/losers hierarchy'.

To further understand how Davies and Verhaeghe's theories of neoliberal failure as the generation of social hierarchy can relate to failure in video games, the writing of Aubrey Anable is relevant. Focusing in more detail on the loser/failure side of the equation, Anable examines the inevitability of failure in a video game context.

> Playing video games means willfully setting oneself up for failure. So much of playing these games is an experience of repeated frustration: not slaying the monster, not saving the princess, falling into molten lava, dying. Why do we bother? One obvious answer is that we hope to improve with each go, and then eventually not fail at all: slay the monster, save the princess, not fall into the lava, live. Part of the pleasure that video games usually afford is the experience of redeeming initial failure with success. (Anable 2018: 104)

By accentuating the repetition of failure in games, Anable opens the repeated process of losing up to a number of contextual and ludic interpretations. The repetition of the death/failure cycle in games will be studied in greater detail further into this chapter. By reading failure in the video game text as a repeated exposure to virtual failure that functions not unlike shock therapy in the treatment of phobias, one method of aligning or consolidating virtual and neoliberal failure can be understood. It is perhaps the cost of failure that makes the former interpretation possible because the virtual failure can be made without repercussions concerning livelihood or general wellbeing (Juul 2013: 7). It therefore follows that the incremental learning process that has been covered by Cremin and previously detailed by Anable provides a meaningful link between virtual and neoliberal failure. Anable contends that the aesthetic of failure must be reclaimed by the interactive medium by drawing attention to 'what happens when our expectations of video game success are upended' (2018: 104). For him, this is done by the study of games in which the player can only fail. It provides the study of ludic, playful failure and inescapable systematic failure and concludes that video games provide the means by which an aesthetics of failure can be reclaimed from neoliberal agendas. By this logic, failure in video games and the associated incremental learning processes can be understood as a liberating force from the winner/loser based hierarchies of neoliberalism and this is accurate to an extent. This is because being able to fail without consequence, whilst simultaneously becoming more adept at navigating those experiences has the means to reorganise pre-established hierarchies. What must also be considered is the converse argument that the repetition of failure in a virtual environment can serve to reinforce contextual and neoliberal constructions of failure. Indeed, any closed system of options that eventually arrive at the opposing poles of success and failure constitute a structure that resembles and therefore indirectly supports the neoliberal status quo. The difference in route to the poles of success and failure is a nuance that will be explored in further detail later in this chapter. For now, there is more meaning to be

unpacked from the ubiquity of success/failure outcomes in video games. Anable also acknowledges that '[o]ne [video game failure] fails forward toward success. Yet capitalism is dependent on failure and its control' (2018: 104). Moreover, the failure of individuals must occur at a massive scale to maintain this ideology.

> More precisely, capitalism can accommodate a tremendous amount of failure as long as its subjects understand their failures as temporary and as the result of personal shortcomings or bad luck, rather than as a larger systemic necessity shoring up an ideology. (Anable 2018: 104)

This statement elucidates a discrepancy between the incremental learning processes of neoliberal and virtual failure. Whereas virtual failure in the video game constitutes a playful space in which a failure directly moves towards the understanding of a solution, neoliberal failure, as understanding neoliberalism as a pervasive subsection of modern capitalism, is a false narrative that manipulates repeated failure to ensure that a corresponding scarcity of success keeps both the impoverished and the highly influential in their respective places. This disparity between real and virtual failure is also noted by Jesper Juul who notes that games promise us a fair chance of redeeming ourselves (2013: 7). There is a guarantee of further attempts, further learning and understanding. '[W]hereas the regular world makes no such promises' (Juul 2013: 7). This means that the illusion of choice is treated differently in the two scenarios: the game comes with a preconceived notion that choice will be repeated until a point of progress and the neoliberal variant covers up the repetition of failure, pinning it squarely on the individual to prevent a pattern of failure from being identified and the illusion of choice from being dispelled. It is clear that the illusion of choice in video games, as understood as a limited amount of predetermined outcomes in a code, and in neoliberal conditions, as understood as a false narrative that manipulates socio-economic scarcity to stratify social class,

operate differently. So the question to be asked at this point is how do forms of neoliberal and video game failure interact? This can be examined in the application of the two kinds of failure to each other. If the neoliberal construction of failure is applied to video games, the result is the increasing frequency and popularity of the online multiplayer games with remote, but human-controlled adversaries. Microtransactions in this environment become an attractive tactical proposition and, by extension, pay-to-win mentalities become an accepted norm. Gameplay becomes secondary to the generation of revenue. On the other hand, applying virtual failure to real life scenarios has different outcomes. As Juul rightly points out, '[g]ames, apparently, are not a pixie dust of motivation to be sprinkled on any subject (2013: 10). Although the incremental learning process of failure can be put to use in real-world scenarios effectively through simulators and other gamified learning operations (Juul 2013: 119), it is also true that directly applying the characteristics of a game as a means of motivation to a situation like a call centre can be equally destructive (Juul 2013: 119). Juul notes 'clear goals and continuous feedback [… allow …] employees [...to] optimize their work for the good of the organization (and their own enjoyment)' (2013: 119). The ironic sentiment of the final parentheses is taken from how gamifying workplace scenarios appears to bring them back full circle deeper into the pressurising tendencies of neoliberalism. The obsession with measurable outcomes, feedback reports, daily, weekly and monthly targets all double back on taking the incremental learning processes of virtual failure. It appears that taking the video game from the domestic environment and transplanting it into the industrial, cancels out incremental learning and instead forces further neoliberal quantification of play (in the guise of performance). It seems to be sadly ironic that the neoliberal agenda can take a notion such as gamification, usually about freedom and playfulness, and transform it into the antithesis of a game. With reference to the gamification of neoliberal industry, Juul satirically asks 'What could go wrong?' (2013: 119).

The cross comparison of video game and neoliberal failures is a compelling means of outlining how the illusion of choice operates in neoliberal spheres. The illusion of choice in a neoliberal setting is always upheld to certain degrees. The same is true to the illusion of choice in games, but whilst with the neoliberal agenda, the illusion of choice is a narrative that manipulates socio-economic scarcity to uphold its hierarchies, the interactive element of games and virtual failure therein can be further nuanced and further examined.

If the illusion of choice in video games is in part predetermined by the code that brings it into existence, that is a limitation that the medium cannot escape from. There are other means of understanding the predetermined sections of video games and interactive media as outlined by Krzywinska in the following extract:

> In each game there are periods in which the player is in control of the gameplay, and at others the player is not, lending a resonant rhythm between self-determination and predetermination. This rhythm is present in most video games, yet in these particular games it takes on a generically apposite resonance within the context of horror because it ties into and consolidates formally a theme often found in horror, in which supernatural forces act on, and regularly threaten, the sphere of human agency. (2002: 13)

It is particularly pertinent that Krzywinska relates the sections of non-agency to supernatural forces. This is both because it is relevant to the study of specifically horror video games but it also opens the oscillations of agency and non-agency within video games to interpret other narratives. Here, the notion of predetermination is equated to the unknowable and by extension self-determination is knowable because it necessarily comes from within. Regarding the illusion of choice, it is precisely an illusion because the subject is not aware that it is taking place. It therefore follows that the

illusion of choice is also equated to a predetermined unknowability that comes into action in cycles of Krzywinska's non-agency. These events of predetermined 'uncontrol' are therefore obvious receptacles for the illusion of choice as inescapable, neoliberal narratives that serve to fulfil each previously mentioned tendency of the neoliberal agenda. But they also work to another purpose that eloquently fits with Krzywinska's notion of cycles of control: the sequences of non-agency also act as a way of pronouncing, and making even more important, the areas by which the player does assume control. This framework will provide a way into understanding the comparison of *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light* in the following section. The representation of gameworlds and the spaces and non-spaces within them makes for a necessary inquest into the illusion of choice in video games and how it can relate to notions of neoliberalism, self-sacrifice and the fetishisation of survival.

8.3. Comparative Analysis of *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light*: Gameworlds of Control

This section will start with a summary of how *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light* fit into the context of this chapter, before relaying an understanding of what a gameworld is. It will then consult the Deleuzian theory of societies of control and how they can relate to a game world before moving into a comparative analysis of linearity and open-world level design in *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light* relating it to the construction of difficulty and supply scarcity and the society of control. Both games' presentation of set pieces will be cross referenced, before being used as a means of outlining the illusion of choice. The society of control will be recognised as a component of the illusion of choice and the perpetuations of neoliberal hierarchies.

Both *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light* are survival horror-shooters whose primary adversary comes in the form of the zombie; the former taking a fungi-oriented approach, one which is based on the natural biology of a genus of parasitic *cordyceps* fungus that take over the host, and the latter presents a more frequently referenced virus-outbreak. The comparison of the selected texts offers

insight into how cycles of control operate within the two games which can then be related to neoliberal strains of the illusion of choice. It is also important to consider that both games represent self-sacrifices in terms of their cutscene content. Early in *Dying Light*, as Kyle Crane (Roger Craig Smith) airdrops into Harran, the game's setting, he is ambushed by the infected and saved by Jade Aldemir (Nazneen Contractor) and Amir Ghoreyshi (Roy Vongtama). As the trio run into a ruined building, Amir sacrifices himself to buy time for Crane and Aldemir. Similarly, in *The Last of Us* Tess (Annie Wersching) reveals that she has been bitten and infected as Joel (Troy Baker) and Ellie (Ashley Johnson) arrive at one of the game's first objectives, the capitol building. Both self-sacrifices are relatively early into the game and are also some of the most archetypal examples of self-sacrifice in this whole study. In terms of their representation in a cutscene however, they extensively resemble the self-sacrifices in film and episodic series examined earlier in this study. That these self-sacrifices occur so early into the experience of playing these games signposts them as a distinctly important topic for the game to explore. The texts reveal that their values and morals (in terms of what the player cannot control) are distinctly aligned with the conclusions that have come from previous sections of this study. As has been implied from the opening section to this chapter with the discussions of the ending sequence of *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light*, self-sacrifice is necessarily an illusion of choice in its instigation and a fetishisation of survival in its pressurising legacy. It is clear that the content of these two texts takes the issue of survival and self-sacrifice as a primary concern; however, it is also true that the video games themselves have much more to add with regards to their interactive ludic and ergodic forms, and specifically in this section with regards to how both games construct what will be from this point on referred to as a gameworld. It is plain to see that audio visual self-sacrifices can be present in video games, however this chapter asks: can self-sacrifice take on an interactive form? Can self-sacrifice be articulated by the ludic sense of play offered by games in this way? And how does that relate to conditions of contemporary neoliberalism?

One of the main differences between *Dying Light* and *The Last of Us* concerns how the two video games represent perspective: the former is first-person and the latter is third person. When consulting the first person perspective of *Dying Light* it will be useful to recall the notion of the camera/self. It will be demonstrated that the camera/self comes into being through the contrasting significations of camera movement and framing in found footage films such as *[REC]*. The movement and positioning of the camera implicates anxiety with the shakes of the camera, or panic and urgency as it blurs into the movement of a character's sharp turn. There is therefore a paradox of self-sacrifice that the camera/self must endure for more (othered) self-sacrifices to be documented. In video games, the emphasis shifts to the self and away from the camera from the assumption that there is no camera and only the generation of computer graphics through the game-engine. By extension, the perspective is also generated in relation to the graphical content of the gameworld and the movement of the player is based on selective limitations of what the player/ character can see as they move through virtual time and space.

As has been noted in the case study centred on the examination of the camera/self, perspective is necessarily a restriction of choice in that a viewpoint is constituted by both what is and what is not in view. The choice to change what is and what is not seen represents a change in perspective, whether it is in continuity to one character or view point or a transfer to somewhere/someone else. Therefore, the opportunity to explore the world of Harran in *Dying Light* in the first person mode contributes an assemblage of choices that are simultaneously non-choice, an anchoring of the player/character self to perspectives growing organically out of a process of exploration. The prevalence of the crosshair for the aiming of firearms and melee weapons alike presents a constant reminder that combat is ever present on the event horizon.

Moving away from the camera/self, a similar model can be applied to *The Last of Us* even though the game is third-person. The two gameplay methods become more similar because they become about incremental movements of the in-game camera to survey the obstacles, dangers and vistas of the gameworld they exist within. As in-game perspective becomes defined to a greater extent by restricted fields of view that can move to the player's command, the introduced element of choice completely breaks down the model of the camera/self. This means that accurately analysing self-sacrifice will require its formulation into a ludic or interactive format. The player's manipulation of perspective will be brought into the game through the commonly encountered cross-hair that denotes aiming in shooter games. The restrictions and spatial alignments that ordinarily correspond to basic exploration and visual sensation are gamified in terms of what to shoot at and how to time and approach the zombie shootout and therefore much of the gameplay. It will be argued that, now perspective has taken on a frequent interactivity, self-sacrifice must also take on the spatial gamification of perspective, the aiming, the shooting and the gradual mastery over this outcome and how this process occurs will be analysed further into this chapter. Moreover, because perspectives in video games are constructed from generated graphics, the study of the composition and layout of those graphics are more likely to yield greater understanding as to the construction of the illusion of choice, the fetishisation of survival and their relation to neoliberal agendas.

There are many aspects of the gameworld that relate to the illusion of choice, but for now the terminology of the gameworld will be defined in more detail. Marie Laure Ryan takes issue with the term interactive, correctly pointing out that interactivity is not unique to video games and that a process of interacting does not necessarily constitute the gameplay loop of action and reaction that makes up the fabric of video games (2011: 35). This study up until this point has used the term interactivity with the implication of re-interactivity as a follow up. Something like a dishwasher can be interactive because there are numerous programmable settings. Re-interactivity means that the

inputted controls constitute a series of interactions each dependent on the last and therefore more accurately describes a video game. Similarly, for Ryan, the gameworld '"kicks back" whenever the agent performs an action [...] they can be a human and a programmable machine, because such a machine can simulate a mind or a dynamic environment. (2011: 35). There is a coming together of the player imagination and the game system in a space that is constantly changing both in relation to and outside of the player/character's actions. The gameworld is the spatial interplay of these codified fluctuations and visual indications. Kristine Jørgensen brings into consideration the user interface, that is health bars, minimaps, gauges and selection menus, that appear on screen solely for the player. It is argued that these icons and graphical indicators are incorporated into the gameworld itself, which is considered to be a series of further indications of what landmarks and areas are traversable and by what means (Jørgensen 2013: 5). Therefore the gameworld exists also as a cycle of information exchange whereby access to different sets of information is determined by the specific challenges that the game is programmed to present to the player. David Ciccoricco draws attention to specifically what is asked of the player in the following terms:

> The concepts of attention and perception thus open themselves to further consideration in tracing the way such processes are aestheticized and enacted in gameworlds. For instance, players are continually initiating learned and internalized routines to navigate and explore the game environment in the attentional mode of focus-execute; and at the same time, they are continually responding, with skill and often great speed, to new stimuli introduced into the visual field. (2015: 93-94)

Here the aesthetics are related to the actions of the player. For instance, details that are required to complete a level should be correctly lit and rendered clearly. Moreover, Ciccoricco also recognises the process in operation when a player internalises a route; the space of the gameworld is no longer

a disconnected series of planes and directions but instead resembles a careful trajectory that navigates potential hazards and shortcuts. The player's capacity to plan and carry out tasks with the exchange of information and the possible 'kick back' of unforeseen eventualities elevates the gameworld to a definitive and recognisable property of the video game. In another sense, the perfectly designed gameworld works with the player's imagination after gameplay has stopped.

However, the gameworld should not be without meaningful restriction. That is essentially what is articulated by Krzywinska's notion of cycles of control (2002: 13). A pertinent way to understand and assign contextual resonance to the meaningful restrictions within a video game world is by taking the application of the Deleuzian society of control. The society of control can be understood as an environment that has as its primary authority electronic documentation (1990: 7) making the social conditions both more permissive but also traceable to a considerable degree. It is the juxtaposition of the open environment by which the subject can purportedly travel to any given point in terms of their physical capability, yet electronic and data-based restrictions can kick in when a set of pre-programmed conditions are met. Moreover, the exact position of people within the society of control produces data (through smart-phones to take a relatable example) and is always trackable to authorities. The control society is anchored on data as a traceable and objective authority, one that can be defined by the universal transfer of information and reads as a prescient precursor to the internet and coming of the information age. The society of control also constitutes an extreme quantification of qualifiable experience, for instance, the act of taking an evening walk is traced and documented in the society of control as a 5pm departure from a place and a 7pm return in line with Deleuze's definition (1990: 7). The key relevance of Deleuze's idea to this study is the means by which the process of quantification itself becomes a means of control. This concept can be epitomised by both the excessive monitoring of an employee's performance in the workplace (neoliberally) or the programming and codification of a gameworld (virtually) yet both operate to

different consequences pertaining to the illusion of choice. As has been already established, neoliberal and virtual failure operate to uphold different narratives (of maintaining the scarcity that constitutes social hierarchies for the former and of the gradual process of incremental learning for the latter). It therefore follows that the illusion of choice (which is produced by configurations of failure; how people try to mitigate failure) is more nuanced in video games and so must be examined in more detail. Therefore, the ways in which the construction of the gameworld in *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light* will be tied to the Deleuzian understanding of the society of control.

Despite their many similarities, *Dying Light* exhibits an open-world structure to its gameworld and *The Last of Us* differs markedly with its composition of sequential areas. These areas are considered sequential because they occur immediately after each other yet some lateral exploration is possible because of more expansive regions such as the University and Bill's Town. Moreover, what is distinctive about gameworld structure in *The Last of Us* is that it is linear in that the player cannot return to previous areas past certain points. *Dying Light's* open world is divided into three segments: The Slums (early-game), Old Town (mid-game) and The Antenna (late-game). The player's exploration branches out from the tower that serves as the largest settlement in the game and the player's tutorial area. There is therefore an argument that *Dying Light's* geographic structure can be considered to a certain extent sequential, albeit to a lesser extent and not linear in that the player can return through whichever spaces they can manage. However, the scope for deviating from the string of 'main quests' that the game gently pushes the player towards is far wider. The gameworld however is not merely represented in degrees of distanciation; it is the horizontal and vertical composition of virtual space and each interactable element within it. *Dying Light* incorporates a free-running mechanic that serves to subvert any preconceived notions of normative spatial boundaries; wall running, jumping from rooftop to rooftop, sprinting across expansive tightropes, climbing towering pylons and radio masts. The freedom these movements offer is given relativity

by the sluggish and docile zombies who bunch together in the streets. Moreover, as the game progresses, more dangerous zombies learn to climb; the relative freedom of movement is used to prescribe relative levels of danger and actualise the degrees to which choice can be realised and implemented. As the player progresses, Crane gains access to even more acrobatic abilities and even a grapple-hook gun that gives even greater degrees of freedom and almost instantaneous traversal through the gameworld layout. The composition of space between each street is a restriction of choice that the player/character gradually makes trivial through their progression. Zombie choke-points are arranged around areas of narrative importance and the compound surrounding the base of the first radio tower that is to be climbed is full of numerous different types of zombie. As the player gains more means of transgressing the geographical restrictions the gameworld puts into place, the gameworld also simultaneously ushers the player into darkened high-rise flats teeming with the infected where their acrobatic mastery has lesser impact. This simultaneous development of acrobatic free-running ability in its respective skill-tree[1], along with the gradual funnelling towards places where such ability can be less effective, significantly nuances the conception of the illusion of choice. The traversal capacity of the player character can grow exponentially within the rules of the game, but the gameworld must also limit this, with the layout and structure of the areas it guides the player to. This means that the player, seeing a relative lack of return in the game's guidance through interior spaces in the main questlines, explores other areas in which the acrobatic ability or grapple hook will serve function more effectively. Herein lies a paradox whereby the game's guidance, using the status of primary quests, can also push the player into different sections of the gameworld for more freedom of movement, and yet the player was still prompted by the game through main quest spatial funnelling to explore elsewhere. This constitutes an example of the illusion of choice generating a paradox from the progression of the player. It outlines how, like

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[1] A skill tree is a visual representation of a character's progression in-game. It branches out to different skills and capabilities that are accessed, one after another, by spending skill points that are usually earned by playing the game.

virtual failure, the virtual illusion of choice can serve incremental development. But there is still that underlying limitation present which, in this case, is something to be transgressed which fits with the often task-driven structure of the video game questlines. The use of the grappling gun represents another notable example of this; grappling onto surfaces from far away brings with it a new set of hazards. On one hand, it delivers an almost game-breaking fluidity of traversal but on the other hand, receiving the grappling gun coincides with primary quests that require the climbing of radio towers. Moreover, the discovery of firearms coincides with a compulsory mission to the Old Town area, which is only accessible through the sewers, where the range, and therefore capability, of firearms is severely limited.

The previous analysis outlines a paradoxical process whereby progress through a certain skill-tree pushes the player towards a certain playstyle yet the unfolding and eventual traversal of the open gameworld funnels the player towards areas in which that playstyle is less viable. The player can either ignore the guidance of the free-running skill tree or the guidance of the main quest into spaces in which the free-running skill tree is of less value. Both ignorances are an illusion of choice because they both submit to the game's authority in different ways but do so in a more constructive manner than the neoliberal illusion of choice. If the player recognises that items such as the grappling gun are less effective in enclosed spaces and instead seek out quests in more expansive areas, their own merit can be held responsible. Similarly, a player who recognises that the greater rewards come from pushing ahead with the main series of quests (Tahir's Machete being a very powerful weapon found near the end of the main series of questlines) are duly rewarded for making limited use of the free-running skill tree by whatever other means they can. There is a coexistence of choices that exist in parallel in the open gameworld ('do this not that' and 'do that not this') and with the selection of one option a discord is generated (one cannot simultaneously do 'this' and 'that'; one logic has to be obeyed) and stored in the game's datafiles. This constitutes a flow with

and against the current of the game's narrative momentum that is scripted into the *Dying Light's* programming. It is helpful at this point to consult Deleuze's societies of control because this theory helps contextualise the confluences and dissonances of recording and documenting information pertaining to the restriction and influences of lived experience. Deleuze notes the differences between control and discipline, citing the former as the definitive condition of the modern mindset. He holds that 'the numerical language of control is made of codes that mark or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become "dividuals," and masses, samples, data, markets and "banks". (Deleuze 1990: 5). The process described here is both the quantification of the individual (or the player) which is essential to the perpetuation of the neoliberal agenda, but also the storage of data. It is the retention of information and data that actualises how the control is simultaneously both permissive but also a restrictive force. It puts forward quantified and documented degrees of liberty that are the norm under the neoliberal condition. Some actions are encouraged, some are discouraged, but they are without exception recorded thus constituting Deleuze's control. *Dying Light's* skill tree is a good example of this. It is necessarily a quantification of the player's growth but also a documentation of it. This progression logs certain actions, with differing outcomes, it maps the locations that represent logical destinations for its rewards. It trades and suggests with the player and, as the previous analysis has covered, it can contradict the primary progression of the game's narrative. The game chaperones the player through various logics and motivations, some of which are incompatible, conflicting courses of action, all the while the player's movement through them is continuous and written into save datafiles. At this point the operation of *Dying Light* is less about what choices the player makes and how they can be considered operative illusions of choice and more about the recording of choice and how such choices can be reimagined as combinations and configurations of sequential code that can be replicated, analysed and repeated. This process can be read as an unfettered neoliberal quantification of lived experience and resource, allowing for the marketisation of society and

ultimately its control through the circulation of data and its world-wide cross-comparison. Deleuze too arrives at this conclusion, observing that '[w]e are taught that corporations have no soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world. The operation of markets is now the instrument of social control and forms the impudent breed of our masters' (1990: 8).

The Last of Us offers a thematically similar yet structurally distinct gameworld. Its sequential organisation is distinctive because it does not allow the player to return to previous areas. This is significant because the game's design exhibits an overt influence over the player/character progression as opposed to *Dying Light's* interacting levels of implicit guidance. Further, being unable to return to previous areas creates a temporal synchronicity with the narrative. Restrictions on retrograde exploration translate into gameplay as a linear temporality and bring about a sense of urgency that pushes the player/character through dangerous and apocalyptic situations. This means that the narrative progression and the temporality of player exploration (understood as the timeframe created as the player explores and moves through the level) to align in positive reinforcement. Whilst *Dying Light* offers a greater degree of choice to the player in the exploration of levels by this logic, the temporality of player exploration can contradict the temporal restrictions imposed by the narrative such as quests that include the GRE's threats to raise Harran to the ground for example. The player learns roughly halfway through their exploration of Old Town that the GRE (ironically, the Global Relief Effort) intends to destroy all of Harran to eradicate the virus. At this point the player/character can still perform a number of side quests and tangential expeditions that constitute points at which the temporality of player exploration deviates from narrative temporality. The result of aligning narrative and player exploration temporalities in *The Last of Us* is different from the sense of temporal and ludic dissonance that can occur in *Dying Light* by the aforementioned logic. Retrograde exploration does not correspond to retrograde temporal progression; rather a backwards exploration still moves forward in time which can in fact be

understood as a defining feature of the video game medium. *The Last of Us* allows a certain degree of back-tracking up until a point. There are, therefore, a series of thresholds that punctuate the gameworld that, once passed, the player/character cannot revert back to/through. It is this structure of non-return that contributes the alignment of narrative and player exploration temporalities and its effect is counterintuitive: the prevention of back-tracking beyond certain events in *The Last of Us* promotes a compulsion to thoroughly explore each area that is progressed to sequentially because the player comes to understand that it is likely that they will be unable to return if they overlook supplies, ammunition and tools. It is therefore, in the restriction of retrograde exploration, along with the scarcity of supplies, that a greater degree of more compact lateral explorative freedom is encouraged. Indeed, other courses of action can be posited by the game: for instance, on higher difficulties, the frequency with which the player/character comes into contact with supplies is far lower and this enforces an efficient, stealth-based playstyle. Battles are chosen carefully here but the opportunity for tangential supply foraging is almost completely negated. The alignment of narrative and player exploration temporalities becomes even tighter in this scenario and back-tracking is as dangerous as moving forward because there are still many hazards left in the player/characters' wake. Hence, there is an in-game illusion of choice whereby the player chooses to play on a certain difficulty that demands a certain playstyle that is fittingly the most restrictive to player/character agency. By the same token, the player also has the option to play on an easier difficulty than normal that produces even more supplies and weaker enemies to the point that the player may even not need to commit lateral exploration to stock up. This gives the player the choice to frequently explore more wide-open areas and smaller buildings but it makes their contents less meaningful; the reward is more frequent but less in demand. Either way, the manipulation and adjustable quantification of supplies in peripheral areas of the sequential levels corresponds to an illusion of choice both in the selection of difficulty and the progression through the gameworld. The game manipulates, quantifies and distributes the scarcity of supplies based on the player's decisions

made during the exploration of the gameworld but also in the selection (and resultant quantification) of its difficulty. There is an interaction between these two choices that is not present in *Dying Light* because of *The Last of Us'* linearly sequential gameworld and its non-return structure. In *Dying Light*, higher difficulties do make the encounter with supplies less frequent, but, in this game, the player/character has more area (and therefore a greater degree of freedom) to search for helpful items. In *The Last of Us*, the quantification and distribution of supply scarcity has a direct effect on the player/character's experience of the game world. Even though subjective difficulty and degrees of prior knowledge factor in as a grey area on this judgement, *The Last of Us* exhibits a connection between the quantification and adjustability of scarcity and the traversal of sequentially linear levels that constitutes an illusion of choice in every lateral exploration that the player 'decides' to (not) make.

The relationship between the quantification of scarcity in game and a spatial illusion of choice that is presented in *The Last of Us'* sequentially linear gameworld design can be used to gain further insight into neoliberal social deformities of value. As has already been established, the neoliberal illusion of choice is operative because it requires individuals to repeatedly fail (Anable 2018: 104) thus generating a hierarchy of successes and failures. The perpetuation of this hierarchy positions those at the summit as the head manipulators of social and economic opportunity and therefore resource. In game, it is the player who can determine the distribution of scarcity in the gameworld from the difficulty selection menu; harder difficulties stifle the amount of supplies the player finds on their playthrough. This generates an in game illusion of choice whereby supply sites are gradually phased out in higher difficulties and this can be read as a gradually more confining illusion of choice that forms a conduit for predominantly forward exploration. Therefore, in game, the manipulation of scarcity constitutes the illusion of choice whereas in neoliberal conditions the reverse is true: the illusion of choice perpetuates the manipulation of scarcity. This inversion

simultaneously links and differentiates the relationship between the illusion of choice and the manipulation of scarcity in virtual and neoliberal environments. Either way, the quantification of ergodic spatial systems is an essential link between neoliberal and virtual environments. Jaroslav Švelch discusses the quantification of the monster in terms of making it a knowable entity within a code:

> Although video game monsters are still made to look disgusting or awe-inspiring, their behaviors are dictated by algorithms that can be analyzed and described. They are slain by the hundreds and turned into rewards and mementoes of players' efforts and skills. (2013 : 202)

Švelch makes this observation in regards to how the monster can be defined as part of a numerical system and functions in and as part of a chain of informatic exchange. It is also important to note how the player too contributes to this process in overcoming and understanding the knowable monster as a statistic of 'enemies slain'. Whereas Švelch makes the case for the monsters as a knowable code that makes up part of the system, it is argued that this logic extends to gameworlds and the entities they contain. As has been established, the video game text can only ever remain tethered to the restrictions of what can feasibly be written into the game's code (or virtualized on each console generation). It therefore fits that the gameworld too must be held to these necessary but definitive codified boundaries. This same logic is followed by Švelch as he goes on to apply the society of control to his 'monster by numbers' approach. 'Video game monsters, therefore, exemplify the way in which societies of control deal with and take advantage of enmity, threat, and challenge (Švelch 2013: 194). What is implicit in this outlook is the underlying assumption that quantification and competition are one in the same thing, or at least so similar that they no longer warrant distinction. Societies of control offer both quantifications, in the monster becoming a series

of codes and numbers, but also a series of challenges and oppositions. This confirms the hypothesis that a known quantity is necessarily comparable and therefore a configuration of competition. Deleuze holds that '[m]an is no longer enclosed, but man is in debt' (1990: 7-8). In other words, the individual is free to be so long as their worth is directly quantified within a system of informatic control. It is this trade-off for relative liberty with the caveat of documentation and systematic quantification that cultivates the widespread illusion of choice and keeps neoliberal hierarchies in their place. The society of control therefore constitutes a direct linkage of gamified and neoliberal worlds through notably different strains of the illusion of choice, with the quantification of lived and virtual experience positioned as common denominators. This leaves the failure outcome as a distinguishing factor because, virtually, it invites an incremental process of learning and eventual progression; whereas, neoliberally, internalised and repeated failure is a hypostasis that keeps pre-existing socio-economic hierarchies in place. It is for this reason that the following section will consult the various cycles of virtual failure and use them to gain insight into neoliberal constructions of failure.

8.4. Failure/Death Cycles and Asynchronous Cumulative Self-sacrifice

The following section will examine the failure/death cycle in *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light*. Failure/death can be understood as the intersection between the in-game avatar's death and the player's incidence of failure. This includes each mistake that leads to the failure/death and every penalty incurred or not incurred as a result. Because consequent failures can take place as a result of previously accrued failure/death penalties, the failure/death cycle can take on a concentric structure of failure that begins to resemble the composition of the signifying chain of self-sacrifices as well as the gauging of neoliberal hierarchies based on the failure of others. Whereas the previous section was a study into the manifestations and configurations of the illusion of choice, this section analyses the effects of the illusion of choice and how it relates to neoliberal critiques through self-

sacrifice. With the added element of player agency, concentric failure cycles may or may not happen, but cycles of control, as theorized by Krzywinska (2002) provide a framework by which cycles of control can be applied to cycles of failure/death. The cycle frequency and temporal digressions that these cycles can arrange in the experience of playing are then compared and connected to the notion of repeated ghosts of failure and success (Hancock 2016). This provides a platform for the position of an asynchronous, cumulative self-sacrifice by which the player sacrifices failed attempts in the incremental learning process to perform to the demands of the game. In providing a link between cycles of control, and therefore the illusion of choice, the fetishisation of survival, and therefore self-sacrifice, this non-spatial atemporal representation of self-sacrifice depicts the confluence of many aspects of self-sacrifice that have been covered in this thesis. It also exemplifies the gradual and incremental learning process that is not only the difference between virtual and neoliberal iterations of failure, but is also a counterpoint from self-sacrifice as represented in other media as fixed, temporally linear chains of pressuring self-sacrifice or the constant but mutating desire to survive. This understanding of self-sacrifice in different media, and the different temporal modes they bring with them, outlines the false-meritocracy of neoliberalism as its most damaging characteristic and the ubiquitous quantification of qualitative experience as a limiting side-effect. This is because it is the incremental learning process that cumulative asynchronous self-sacrifice foregrounds that is the definitive difference between failure in games and in neoliberal realities.

Both *Dying Light* and *The Last of Us* move away from the conception of the zombie popularised by George Romero; the shambling undead are present in *Dying Light* but it is under the pandemic-infection narrative. The infected in *The Last of Us* are produced by a fungal mutation which marks a clear shift in the imagining of the zombie in both games: from the undead to the infected. The significance of this in these two games is the understanding that the adversaries that populate both

gameworlds are not dead. Moreover, in *Dying Light*, antizin is a drug that can delay the onset of infection. In *The Last of Us*, Ellie is immune to the virus which, along with the availability of antizin, positions a narrative of infection that is different and slightly more forgiving to the one-bite-doom of many zombie films and series. This changes the relationship between the player and the infected in such a way that there is a greater emphasis on the death of the player/character as opposed to the bite/onset model popular in non-game narratives. It is contended that this fits with the video game medium because it means that the player/character can take damage without changing into a zombie but it also marks out death as a space for the player/character to enter in states of failure. The infected cannot die because they cannot lose their already lost agency; the character's death is a loss of agency that implies the player/character's humanity. Consequently, both *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light* align failure and death in the positioning of the player and its many adversaries, human and otherwise, with death coming to be synonymous with the loss of agency. It is this mechanic, along with the cyclical nature of gameplay it affords, that generates the call for the failure/death cycles which are now to be juxtaposed.

8.5. Making the Case for a Ludic Interactive Self-sacrifice

The failure/death cycle in *The Last of Us* occurs whenever Joel (or Ellie) is killed by either one of the infected ('clickers', 'runners', 'bloaters') or a human assailant. A lack of ammunition, medkits or general preparation can indicate the start of this cycle before the failure/death is actualised in gameplay (this relates to the previous section with the discussion of supply distribution scarcity in level design). There are actually dozens of death animations for both Ellie and Joel with anything from wall smash or neck break to neck bite; each enemy has a slightly different animation corresponding to their appearance and physical animation traits. The 'clicker' death sequence will be used as an example here because they often contribute a single hit kill, which can mean that the player may well be seeing the animation frequently. There are numerous ways to kill a clicker,

mushroom-headed enemies that make a characteristic clicking sound that functions like sonar. The shift to stealth-based gameplay means that the player must sneak close enough to the clicker to kill it with a shiv or brick, without being detected. Further, for most of the game, gunshots are highly discouraged because clickers move in groups and the gunshot sound alerts them in number. Therefore, moving from clicker to clicker in an area represents multiple cycles of agency; the movement must be gradual and imperceptible and the choice of weapon must be premeditated. Failure is constituted by discovery; the clicker death animation is brought on by a single contact with the enemy and is not subjected to the subtraction of health points (as is the case with other enemies). Upon death, there is a cut that takes place regardless of how the player has positioned the camera. The movement is disruptive and microcosmically signifies how agency has been torn from the player as the neck is torn from the character. Krzywinska notes a similar mechanic in the oscillation of player control and non-control in *Resident Evil 3*, noting that 'the player is often not able to effect any actions and can only watch impotently as Nemesis, the archvillain of the game, swings the helpless avatar over his head' (2002: 18). The camera can be facing any angle around the back of the player and can be also tilted to gain a better sense of the lay of the land in the game's third person format. No matter where the camera is aligned within the control of the player, death instantly moves it to a fixed point, to a state of stasis cuing the removal of player agency and the failure of the section. With the removal of agency, failure is signposted and this is a commonality that will reoccur in *Dying Light*. The sound design provides a piercing, reversed sound-wave texture that is the indicator of every fail-state coded into the game and coincides with an abrupt cut to black that can end with the sound cue but also start with it, depending on the timing of the death sequence. The clicker scenario is referred to here because it represents one of the first significant challenges of the game. It is easy to fail here; the death-sound provides a conditioning that recurs until it begins to subliminally correspond with loss of agency. The surreptitious movement between clickers in this way is a cycle that is interrupted by death, the player's failure is signposted by the

removal of that which defines their status as a player: control. The player decides how to sneak between hazards, and if they do not fail, the cycle starts again, agency is retained and their performance is deemed acceptable. This is how the interaction with adversaries in *The Last of Us* forms cycles of agency and non-agency in a rudimentary fashion. But the treatment of death itself also plays a considerable part in terms of how the cycle starts again. The treatment of death in *The Last of Us* is decidedly lenient; there are no discernable penalties and the game allows the player to try again from the last episode, which will correspond to a notable cutscene or a gameplay progress marker. There are rarely large areas to re-traverse to return to the player's previous point of progress. This means that the player character is free to fail without considerable consequence, the player tries things, is adventurous, pushes on in the face of adversity, it contributes further to the linear momentum of the narrative and defines the sense of ludic play that is so important to the medium. There is a process of learning that comes with this approach that is incremental and far more expansive than the remit of gameworld boundaries. Moreover, the failure death/cycles are tightly wound, demonstrating a high frequency, with relatively short distances to travel to get to the point at which the player last died (at least compared to *Dying Light* where the player is required to restart from a safezone). With repeated failure/death, the oscillation of agency and non-agency is swift and occupies a small virtual space. It is with this configuration of failure/death cycles that the incremental learning process that epitomises virtual failure is most pronounced. The cycle occurs frequently but also in a concentrated fashion; the process intensifies the learning process not only because its cycles of agency are densely packed, but also because this cycle is incorporated into the player's expectation; they continue to learn more frequently because they understand that the opportunities for learning from failure will be available should they be needed.

Dying Light treats failure/death differently to *The Last of Us* even if the adversaries it represents are remarkably similar. The preparation phase is important but not to the same extent as with *The Last*

of Us; supplies are more plentiful and the player is free to roam the gameworld, searching as far and wide as their free-running capabilities permit. On failure/death, there is no cut to a fixed angle. The first-person perspective is upheld as the point of view slumps on the floor and black swathes crawl from the top of the silent screen. The lack of sound here generates a sense of intangibility to the death as though it is immaterial but expected, it coats it with an inevitability that, on closer expectation, is always guaranteed by consequent resurrections. 'YOU ARE DEAD' is unapologetically plastered across the screen as if there was ever any doubt about the sentiment, and the amount of survival points the player/character loses as a failure-penalty is displayed below in red. *Dying Light* exhibits harsher death penalties on the player than *The Last of Us*, it quantifies the degree of loss in a deficit of survival points. These points represent progress towards new survivor skills in game but they also embody the fetishisation of survival through quantification. This mechanic is the link between the fetishisation of survival and the neoliberal quantification of lived (or in this case 'deathed' experience) because it is, in-game, both of these things at the same time. Survival points are about more than just surviving, they represent an exchangeable market of skills and passive abilities that make other sections of the game more manageable. Moreover, when failure/death subtracts these points, it puts them in greater demand, it concentrates their value and transfers that value to the player's mind. This is an example of the world-state confluences that link the apocalyptic survive or die mentality and the neoliberal false meritocracy. *Dying Light* is also spatially less forgiving than *The Last of Us*. Failure/death prompts the player/character's restart from the last safehouse they rested at. Safehouses are areas of the world map that the player/character restores power to in order to fortify them from the 'biters' outside. Therefore widespread exploration is rewarded with the higher likelihood of having a safehouse nearby potential failure/death sites. The incidence of safehouses, no matter how many the player/character has colonised, is far fewer than the episodic breaks that *The Last of Us* works into its gameworld. This means that the retraversal back to the point of death is invariably longer in *Dying Light*. Cycles of agency and non-

agency are therefore more drawn out; after death, the player is in control for a longer time until they reach the point of death, but because they are retracing their progress up until the point of a previous failure, is that concomitant agency meaningfully separate to the agency that was lost in failure/death? It is a failure death/cycle because it houses within it the cycle of agency and non-agency, even when wilfully returning to the position of a previous death, the initial failure remains that instigated the retracing of steps and is therefore an oscillation towards non-agency. Indeed, the player could choose another path away from the failure/death site and cancel out the cycle of failure/death, but as was covered in the previous section, *Dying Light* funnels its most difficult and pressing challenges through the main quest lines because of the restrictions of the gameworld setting. Even if the player does decide to deviate from the failure/death site, it is likely that they will have to venture back there at some point during the playing of the game. Either way, compared to *The Last of Us*, the failure/death cycles and the cycles of agency and non-control are less frequent, because failure death is more harshly punished, and less tightly packed, because the revisiting of the failure/death site is spatially more distant and wider reaching. The wide arc of these oscillations teaches not how to not fail (as was the case with *The Last of Us*) but how to return from failure, as well as that failure/death can be quantified. It generates a set of values behind the gameplay that prioritises exploration (rewarding the explorer with more frequent safehouses) and punishes the player with exploration's opposition, the retracing of steps. Incremental learning is not denounced but it is not advocated to the same extent as was seen in *The Last of Us*.

The logic behind analysing the game's configuration of the failure/death agency/non-agency cycles is to emphasise how the incremental learning process that defines the difference between virtual and neoliberal failure can be understood as possessing many of the same characteristics of self-sacrifice as it has been detailed in previous chapters of this study. Both *The Last of Us* (Tess) and *Dying Light* (Amir) depict instances of self-sacrifice in which the sacrifice is already turning. In both cases

the sacrifice was already compromised and the illusion of choice is operative from the pressurising legacy that surviving for their sacrifice inevitably brings with it. Moreover, the illusion of choice has always been a key operator in self-sacrifice throughout this study; most sacrifices are infected or immobilised before they make their final stand. Following this logic that has been outlined in previous chapters, the volition of self-sacrifice is not as integral as first thought. It therefore fits to position the repeated failures that bring about incremental learning outcomes as their own configurations of player-centric self-sacrifice, of optimum deaths that serve a greater purpose than inaction would serve. As gradual steps towards the survival that self-sacrifice is ironically all about, the repeated failure/death cycle can be thought of as a self-sacrifice because it is virtual and engenders further approaches to it. Even if player deaths are not deliberate, self-sacrifice is in part an illusion of choice, and facilitated by a preexisting infection; in the player such preexisting disadvantages could be a lack of knowledge of the level, a lack of preparation that goes back to the start of the failure/death cycle or a lack of coordination and timing. Are these not the factors that often doom self-sacrificial victims to their preexisting disadvantage in the first place? This thesis has so far determined that the legacy of self-sacrifice attributes extreme importance to survival. It is therefore the case that each death brings with it more knowledge of how to survive but also more pressure to do so. It is also possible that players may 'deathrun' through certain challenging sections to gain a greater overview of the challenges that are to be presented to them. This is so that they can cultivate a degree of muscle memory in some practise attempts and bring together both premeditated coordination and the limited supplies the game may offer in later attempts. Following this logic, this would present a cumulative, asynchronous self-sacrifice with a much greater degree of volition however, as was previously stated this is not an outright requirement. This section will conclude with the position of incremental learning through the failure/death cycle as asynchronous, cumulative self-sacrifice that plays the in-game elasticity of death and the player's cycles of agency to suggest why self-sacrifice of this kind is so relevant to neoliberal realities.

Micheal Hancock discusses abstraction of self in a neoliberal climate and makes the following observation about cumulative deaths in a video game format:

> In this sense, the player is faced with ghosts of repetition coming and going: the ghost of the future, flawless performance and the ghost of the past failure, both moments that no longer exist in the game's memory, but persist in the player's mind. The notion of the skilled player – the gamer – depends on the erasure and elimination of these ghosts of past failure [...] (2016: 168)

The erasure of past failures from the memory of the game is a necessary block of progress; it is what the game must implement to ensure that failure/death has sufficient consequences to retain the player's attention. That these memories persist in the mind of the player actualises the learning process but also makes clear two different temporalities of learning: the game's asynchronous organisation and the player's sequential organisation. Moreover, the erasure of the player's past failings (intentional or otherwise) does not occur with the advent of skill, rather such memories stay with the player and that skill is a result of the player growing from them. The ghosts, as Hancock puts it, are temporal markers that each represent a past failure and a character/avatar-based self-sacrifice, they coexist in the mind of the player and the forgotten instances of the games' save-states, they are brought into existence sequentially, but the incremental learning occurs outside of time, each present informed by the ghosts of previous attempts. Each return to the failure/death site represents a temporal excursion, moving forward in time to the player, and in parallel, laterally in terms of the recurring present of failure/death cycles and the developing performance of the player. That self-sacrifice can be asynchronous and cumulative in this way is unique to the ludic and re-interactive nature of the video game text. The failure/death cycle can also take on a concentric

structure; the oscillation back to the point of failure can be met with failure on the way. While this is unlikely with the small amounts of progress required to retry a failed section in *The Last of Us*, in *Dying Light*, it is a very real possibility. This causes a failure/death cycle within a failure/death cycle and is the opposition of the gradual incremental learning process; the concentricity implies that the same mistakes are being made, or worse, that the same mistakes are not being learned from. The build-up of concentric failure/death structures in this way is overwhelming; it is not a self-sacrifice for progress but one(s) of stasis. Its similarities to the structure of the signifying chain of self-sacrifices are no coincidence because, like the structure of self-sacrifices that form a chain, it represents failure as an ossifying force, like the neoliberal structuring of society based on a perception of the failure of others. Hancock's notion of the erosion of avatar progress in-game against the backdrop of player learning processes that accumulate as atemporal ghosts is the common ground between the neoliberal deformity of perpetuating social hierarchy based on the failure of others, the fetishisation of survival (the goal of the incremental learning processes are inevitably survival-based) and the illusion of choice (as understood as the non-choice that means that self-sacrifice is required in some description). The asynchronous, cumulative self-sacrifice that moves towards a survival goal but does so through a process of gradual and incremental learning and development is undeniably task-based but ultimately comes with the promise of better times that cannot always be said for configurations of the illusion of choice in neoliberal constructions of nepotism, privilege and therefore, ingrained social hierarchy.

8.6. What Ludic Self-sacrifice can Mean as a Cultural Signifier?

In conclusion, the movement to the study of video games is a necessary one because it introduces the possibility of a ludic or interactive self-sacrifice that exposes the illusions of choice that surround the representation of zombie-world self-sacrifice in other media. Further illusions of choice are present in both *Dying Light* and *The Last of Us* but they occur in different and nuanced

forms. Illusions of choice that guide in-game progression push the player towards new discoveries, whereas choices between certain narrative-based endings can have little bearing on the personal outcomes of characters as exemplified by the self-sacrifice of Crane and the final scene of *Dying Light* discussed in the opening of this chapter. The examination of the failure/death cycle in these games has provided the construction of failure as a point of comparison for neoliberal and virtual (in game) failures and what they mean within their respective contexts. Whereas iterations of neoliberal failure accumulate to further stratify already ossified social class boundaries, virtual failure in *The Last of Us* and *Dying Light* instead allows for a way into an interactive self-sacrifice but also a self-sacrifice that is asynchronous and cumulative towards incremental learning and development of the player through the player/character's frequent but productive failure/death cycles. As has already been established, deliberate player/character suicide at first seems like the logical translation from audiovisual self-sacrifice to interactive media. But this is problematic because it assumes the preexisting importance of volition in audiovisual self-sacrifice when in fact the operative momentum of audiovisual self-sacrifice is its transactional exchange to pressurise further survival legacies moving forward. Asynchronous, cumulative self-sacrifice in ludo-interactive zombie media meets the aggregation of death towards survival criteria of this study's formulation of self-sacrifice but does so in a way that gradually teaches and incrementally enriches the knowledge and skills set of the player in a way that no other self-sacrifice can. It is argued that self-sacrifice in this manner makes for a fitting comparison to constructions of neoliberal failure because the accumulation of virtual failure can generate self-development and self-enrichment. Correspondingly, neoliberal failures do not offer such, almost utopian, guarantees as neoliberal failure generates the accumulation of stasis, of the winners/losers hierarchies that fetishise the internalisation of failure and its incorporation into social identity. It is fitting that Hancock refers to the accumulation of failures within games as 'ghosts'. Moreover, the elastic mortality of the player/character imbues a distinct undead quality. Perhaps the accumulation of infected zombies is a

manifestation of stagnating neoliberal failure that pursues and harasses living survivors. Player/ character death as a repeated asynchronous and accumulating self-sacrifice can be seen as the opposite of this manifestation of hierarchy through the failure of others (or in this case the infected zombies), as a way of reclaiming failure with the possibility of progression and transgressing stratified neoliberal structures of hierarchy. The study of illusions of choice and failure death cycles in the game-worlds of *Dying Light* and *The Last of Us* presents these conclusions in a way that further exposes the illusions of choice in previously studied audiovisual self-sacrifices. In the same way that self-sacrifice is paradoxically and counterintuitively about the obsession with survival, an interactive mode of self-sacrifice is equally obsessed with the impossibility of truly liberated choice. Cumulative, non-sequential, ludic self-sacrifice therefore puts forward the possibility of failure as a means of challenging and subverting pre-established notions of hierarchy and status quo.

9. Conclusion

Self-sacrifice as represented in zombie discourse provided a pertinent selection criteria for texts that were analysed in case studies. This also allowed for a series of probing enquiries into the relationship between visualisations of the zombie apocalypse and the socio-political values of modern neoliberalism. Self-sacrifice is therefore positioned as a representation of how individuals realise self-value in metaphorical depictions of neoliberalism. This led to the ascertainment of what representations selfhood and subjectivity can mean within zombie discourse narratives. The notion of survival recurs frequently in film and many other types of media and, at first glance, can be mistaken as merely the perpetuation of selfhood. But, as this thesis has argued, zombie and apocalypse narratives fetishise survival and over-determine its importance to the point that it becomes a metaphor for upholding the status quo of social and economic hierarchies. As this thesis has shown, the previous statement is simplified but nonetheless remains a valid way into the study of representations of survival in film. This is certainly an area in which more research could be conducted in order to compliment or enrich the findings of this thesis. One of the key facets of this argument is that all self-sacrifice, however counter-intuitive it may sound, is committed to survival. It is merely that the survival of one individual may become so unlikely, that the individual commits the self-sacrifice as a ritual to the supposed insurance of the survival of others. There are many different schools of thought that have been called upon by this thesis. From existing criticism on zombie film, through to emerging critiques of streaming platforms and binge culture, the multi-faceted context of this study has been addressed in the methodology chapter. In many ways, this thesis has drawn its originality by exploring how representations of self-sacrifice fit in with established logics and ideas. For this to happen, the subject of what self-sacrifice can mean has taken on a distinctly neoliberal resonance in the place of its more sacred (etymological) roots. This has allowed for the proposal and consequent study of a ludic self-sacrifice as a way of pointing out

the shortcomings of the neoliberal system in terms of its deficiencies of cultural value and tendency towards social stratification.

9.1. Conclusions on Hypothesis

This hypothesis predicted two general classifications of self-sacrifice: separation-based and decoy-based as deduced from viewing a wide range of self-sacrifices in different media. Even across different forms of media, these self-sacrifices of both categories appeared in similar audiovisual forms. It was the content of the self-sacrifices that remained the same; which meant that a change in form was required for each analytical case study. This decision was taken to determine the cultural value of self-sacrifice in zombie discourse of various media forms and its many implications.

The hypothesis demonstrated that Seok-woo's self-sacrifice as the finale of *Train to Busan* would become the paradigmatic separation-based self-sacrifice in the discussion of film because it can be understood by two different but coexistent logics: emotionalism and survivalism. Unpicking these ideas further contributed to a case study that uncovered numerous insights into the condition of modern neoliberalism. Neoliberal deformities of value were also found to be based on damaging conceptions of selfhood and self-worth.

This is why the found footage film *[REC],* represents a form of film that takes a more subjective perspective and therefore comes closer to a representation of self-positioning. This case study focused on decoy-based paradigmatic examples of self-sacrifice and introduced a Lacanian approach to analysis that followed the conception of selfhood to its earliest point. The formulation of the mirror stage posits a state of primordial alienation that comes from the encounter with the mirrored self. From this encounter, all conceptions of selfhood follow a distinct pattern that originates from a point of insufficiency. It is this insufficiency that is recognised in the self-

sacrifices in *[REC]*. *[REC]* also causally links its self-sacrifices to the proposition of a signifying chain of self-sacrifices, a notion that also follows a Lacanian logic. The constant linkage of self-sacrifices in this film exhibits a feedback loop of self-sacrificial legacy, which this study recognises as an instance of *mise en abyme*. The meaning of this chain within the film's narrative and causal workings is that of an infinite series of individuals opposing each other in a hyper-competitive superstructure. This was identified as an underlying real order that tied the film to a competitive reinforcement of political hierarchies and was also manifested in the constant opposition of quarantined individuals and the state.

This hypothesis ascribed value to the legacy of self-sacrifice. This can be seen in the logic and formulations of the signifying chain of self-sacrifices. However, the signifying chain of self-sacrifices can support itself because it has fixed temporal boundaries to be able to project beyond. The examination of self-sacrifice in episodic texts such as *The Walking Dead* does not offer such boundaries because it occurs over a seemingly unending (even if the series has now announced that it will not be renewed past season 11) number of episodes. The audiovisual form takes on a chain-like structure that causes the signifying chain of self-sacrifices to break down. This offers up a different temporal climate for both the viewer and the narrative which, in turn allows self-sacrifice to be examined in new ways. Across longer episodic narratives, self-sacrificial legacies dissolve, re-evolve and transmute through differing environments, character motivations and actions. Here, the self-sacrificial legacy is in a state of flux as opposed to the continual build and amplification of survival pressure seen with the signifying chain of self-sacrifices in filmic texts. The desire to survive becomes the constant in an ever changing environment, the hypostasis that meaning can be attached to. It has been posited that the notion of surviving is held in such high esteem in neoliberal social conditions because it offers an illusion of choice, that one may go to any manner of extremes so long as survival is facilitated. Moreover, surviving itself is definitively a limitation; survival

loses its drama if it does not force its characters to act decisively in the face of terrible conditions. The illusion of choice is a similarly neoliberal confluence of values because it perpetuates social immobility and pre-existing ingrained socio-economic hierarchies. To outline why this is the case, a medium of zombie discourse that is defined by the illusion of choice to different extents was then consulted, video games.

The final section of this hypothesis oversaw an enquiry into the possibility of interactive or ludic self-sacrifice. Audiovisually, the self-sacrifices appeared similarly to how they did in filmic and episodic texts albeit with exclusively computer generated graphics as is to be expected. The addition of the ludic element of gameplay changes how self-sacrifice can be understood because self-sacrifices are so frequently carried out as a last resort, when there are no choices left to make. Moreover, self-sacrifices in games that have traditionally been dedicated to progressing through the level without being killed further complicates how self-sacrifice can exist in single-player games. The final contribution of this study presents a means of reconciling the previous two statements through ludic self-sacrifice. The concept of a ludic self-sacrifice can be understood as the growth and accumulation of experience and learning the player takes on in parallel to the repetition of avatar/character self-sacrifice. This process occurs by a ludic or trial and error-based method of gameplay.

The illusion of choice is coded into the video game's reality because a limited number of options and outcomes are presented as a world of unending possibility. The illusion of choice in this sense is nuanced as an experience that can be both immersive and limiting for the player. The same is not true for neoliberal iterations of the illusion of choice. In this case, the illusion of choice is located as a distinctly neoliberal characteristic because neoliberalism channels it to create scarcity which in turn facilitates social immobility. Moreover, the illusion of choice by this metric is further rooted in

social constructs that go beyond neoliberalism and extend into globalised society more generally. Such extensions include ingrained patriarchal structures, prejudice, systemic racial inequality and systems of privilege. The defining conclusion of this section comes from the juxtaposition of neoliberal and virtual failure. It represents the crux of why different versions and systems of self-sacrifice are so important to modern media studies. Neoliberal failure represents the compounding of socio-economic and pre-existing political hierarchies. It realises an identification with the internalisation of failure that is proven by the prevalence of typically American insults such as 'loser' and crushing realisations of being a 'failure'. This has nothing to do with the individual actions or outcomes someone experiences; rather it is a discourse perpetuated willingly by those who conform to the neoliberal agenda and unknowingly by those who do not. Conversely, virtual failure and its role in ludic self-sacrifice does the opposite; it promotes incremental progression. It is this kind of atemporal, non-sequential self-sacrifice that can provide an alternative rulebook for real versions of failure and, in doing so, puts forward a version of self-sacrifice that instills a greater degree of hope.

9.2. Conclusions on Frameworks

Following on from a background exploration of the context and political formation of neoliberalism in the literature review, the critiques of Paul Verhaeghe and William Davies have provided insight and direction for the discussions of neoliberalism. Verhaeghe and Davies come from the disciplines of psychology and political economics respectively. Their approaches have provided ways into a close analysis of zombie discourse and its relation to modern neoliberalism because they are both concerned with the different ways that the self is valued. The tradeoff of self-value that is observable in self-sacrifice has multiple resemblances to the gauging of self-worth that is a constant under neoliberal conditions. Verhaeghe posits that the main flaw of neoliberalism is the quantification of experience, of the quantification of things that should be appraised in terms of

their quality. The over-quantification of performance in the workplace and time outside of it are things that make individuals alienated from the organisations, institutions and corporations they interact with. This is the opposition of the individual and the organisation which is perpetuated by an ever-growing sense of competition.

Davies builds on Verhaeghe's conception of neoliberal competition by contending that neoliberalism has seen a morality of good and bad be replaced by a competitive morality, one that regards success as good and failure as bad. It has been argued that success provides elevation and a platform to go on to more success and failure usually brings with it further instances of compounding failure. This is how neoliberal failure was concluded to be, in chapter 8, a reinstatement of preexisting hierarchies and simultaneously the precondition for the divisions that make these hierarchies up.

Jesper Juul has also provided a critical framework that is present in chapter 8. His work understands virtual failure differently to neoliberal failure. This juxtaposition of neoliberal and virtual failure facilitates the theorisation of an interactive, ludic type of self-sacrifice, one that is non-sequential, atemporal and conducive to incremental learning, self-development and perhaps most importantly, hope.

Several theoretical frameworks constitute the analysis of this study. The first of which was Lacan's mirror stage. A prominent train of thought in Lacan's work is concerned with coming into being through absence, the imprints left behind by trauma or situational manifestations that give themselves away. The signs that something is missing are in some cases what make it real. This was the position taken on by this study with regards to the modern zombie; the idea that the zombie is defined by what it used to be. It is a remnant or a ruined person, a negative space or imprint of what

they once were. Lacan holds that the mirror stage occupies a point in infantile development when they first encounter selfhood. It will be argued that from here on in, that selfhood comes from a place of alienation, from a point of insufficiency that shapes every identification and interaction that takes place in their life. This too represents the coming into being through absence of identity; the individual's notion of a sufficient self is absent but each aspect of their character depends on that absence. This is why Lacanian theory is so important to understanding self-sacrifice; the logic of self-sacrifice is, literally and figuratively, gauging self-value by expunging the self from the environment. Each line of this coming into existence through absence aligns in this thesis' argument. The limit of Lacanian theory is reached, however, with the progression to the episodic text, *The Walking Dead*. This is because the change in audiovisual form brings about a change in the production of self-sacrificial legacy which is pivotal to the workings and progression of this thesis.

The movement to the study of episodic and ludic texts with the latter two case studies required a change in theoretical framework. Deleuze and Guattari propose a more pliable political framework to go with these ideas that is primarily concerned with notions of flow. Because the legacy of self-sacrifice in episodic texts is mutable through numerous states of change, Deleuze and Guattari's work on multiplicities and the schizophrenic has provided a strong platform to build on. By locating desire as the central point around which the flux of self-sacrificial legacies orbit around, episodic form is allowed for. Such self-sacrificial legacies could cause a personality change in a character (as seen with Rick Grimes) or an enforced supply run. This study sought to locate the drive behind this desire and found it in survivalism. The desire to survive therefore was identified as the hypostasis that self-sacrificial legacies in episodic zombie texts return to cyclically. It was therefore the illusion of choice that comes with notions and constructions of survivalism that would make up the next point of enquiry. To do this, analysis of ergodic and ludic media was required.

9.3. Conclusions on Process

This thesis was centred around a series of paradigmatic examples made by case studies that were analysed by different critical frameworks according to changes of form. A range of different self-sacrifices in a range of different forms were consulted to establish that there are two main categorisations of self-sacrifice: separation-based and decoy-based. Each self-sacrifice could be sorted into one of these categories but many of the sacrifices themselves were visually similar in construction. This is the reason that the chosen paradigmatic examples of self-sacrifice can be understood as emblematic for a larger sample size of self-sacrifice in zombie discourse. From the categorisation of separation-based and decoy-based self-sacrifices, Seok-woo's self-sacrifice in *Train to Busan* was identified as the paradigmatic example of separation-based self-sacrifice in filmic zombie discourse. This was because it could be read in terms of both survivalism and emotionalism. Each of the following paradigms, including *[REC]* as the decoy-based paradigm, were selected because they addressed inquiries brought up by the previous case study. This was also beneficial to the thesis because it meant that each paradigm of self-sacrifice in zombie culture could be explored in more detail. Moreover, more nuanced conclusions could be applied to corresponding neoliberal critiques. To get to this, a combination of audiovisual close readings and theoretical close readings were applied. This allowed detailed observations about zombie discourse of different forms to be applied to the chosen neoliberal critical theory. The conclusions of this thesis are shaped by its intermediality. This is because representations of self-sacrifice occur in zombie discourse without many significant differences between each other. This is not to say that they are experienced by the viewership in a similar way however. The change in form alters how the self-sacrifices are consumed. Society has access now to many different forms of and means to consume media, whether that be through tablets, phones, games consoles, PCs, smart TVs or cinemas. Therefore, this thesis echoes such a multitude not only by covering multiple modes of consumption but also by using their definitive traits to enrich analysis. For example, self-sacrifices in *Train to*

Busan and *The Last of Us* appear visually similar with the obvious difference of *The Last of Us* having computer generated graphics. This allowed for an enquiry into how self-sacrifice can be considered an interactive or ludic process in a video game. The route to the examination of a ludic, interactive self-sacrifice started in chapter 5, the first case study that was set up. This provided the separation-based paradigm for the rest that followed and was identified as the filmic example to analyse in *Train to Busan*. This filmic example laid the foundations for transitions to other forms of zombie discourse, establishing both the connections between self-sacrifice and neoliberalism but also the importance of understanding what selfhood can mean before identifying how its sacrifice can be applied to different cultural critiques in a meaningful way. Following on from this, chapter 6 was centred on the decoy-based paradigm, *[REC],* and how found footage film can represent subjectivity. Moreover, it examined critiques of neoliberalism that are centred on the concept of subjectivity and the first encounter with selfhood. Chapter 7 examined episodic iterations of self-sacrifice and how their legacy is shaped over longer narratives. This presented a case study concerned with how streaming services have been organised into society's personal time and also how the illusion of choice is operative when addressing attitudes towards survival and the hierarchies it creates. The final case study, chapter, 8 details the inquiry into the possibility of ludic self-sacrifice and how it can be understood as a meaningful cultural artefact.

9.4. Final Considerations

Considering that it happens so frequently in zombie discourse, it is strange that self-sacrifice has not received more scholarly attention. Moreover, the notion of survival in a more general sense is not a topic that has been explored in proportion to its prevalence in modern narratives. That is to say, what does it mean when a character values their own survival more highly than anything else? What are they surviving for if everything they cared about has disintegrated? The answers to these questions are both tied into and obscured by two widely accepted assumptions. The first of which is

perhaps the easiest to dismiss: that the desire to survive is entirely genetic and therefore an instinct coded into humanity's DNA. This is problematic because it is too simplistic. However, based on some observable capitalist technical glitches, which are a result of systemic social conditioning, some people understand the hoarding of toilet paper as an acceptable response to a pandemic. Moreover, it must also be noted that the instinct line of argument is less applicable to representations of survival in narrative discourse. The second assumption concerns the relationship between the film or text and the character's lifespan. If all of the characters die too quickly, there is no narrative to build around them therefore survival has some importance and relationship to the duration of the film. But as has been shown by this study in its examination of *The Walking Dead*, new characters can be added as replacements. This does however mean that there needs to be an appropriate rate for the replacements to be introduced; the death of many characters followed by the immediate introduction of the same number of new characters would be absurd. So the representation of survival and surviving does have metaphorical resonance beyond the 'instinct' and 'duration' assumptions. Perhaps it is because of these two assumptions that more attention has not been afforded to the metaphor. As has been established, this study understands the overdetermination and fetishisation of survival to be a metaphor of internalised failure and social immobility, but further study could question what else it can mean.

It has been difficult not to address the current Covid 19 crisis that feels like it has gripped the world as part of a manifestation of this thesis' fixation on the downfall of civilisation through a ruinous pandemic. It has also been unsettling to see the hardships that people have faced attempting to continue their day-to-day lives in such circumstances. In stark contrast, following Apple, Amazon is set to become the second ever trillion dollar corporation (Chalaby, Plunkett 2020), directly profiting from the lack of resources the pandemic has brought about. This demonstrates that the pressures, difficulties and hysteria invoked by the largest pandemic of the information age work to further

entrench pre-established socio-political and socio-economic hierarchies. The fortification of corporate influence, financial assets and political authority as a side effect of the pandemic has never been demonstrated in a more modern or overt manner. It seems that reading the frequent portrayal of self-sacrifice in narratives that feature similar albeit more zombiistic pandemics has been proven a prescient take on the legacies and pressures that drive the modern condition.

The findings that have informed this hypothesis stem from the audiovisual similarity of self-sacrifices. There is a degree of homogeneity to the representation of self-sacrifices in zombie discourse. Maybe this is something that separates them from self-sacrifices in other genres such as disaster films, action films or series and war epics. Zombie-based narratives are different because they frequently rely on a sacrifice with a pre-existing ailment or disadvantage who is allocated to sacrifice themselves to save others. This thesis is solely focused on self-sacrifice in zombie discourse because the frequency with which it is represented reveals something Lacan might call an 'insistence', a symptom that repeats continuously but means something different altogether from its appearance. This is true with self-sacrifice in this case but it can mean a number of different things by a number of different mechanics. The notion of surviving for a character because they sacrificed everything for the group is very different to how Rick Grimes' character changes entirely from moralist to survivalist because of the sacrifice that takes place between Shane and Otis. The former is something that is heard repeated ad nauseum sometimes in the same film whereas many viewers of *The Walking Dead* have likely forgotten Rick's defined sense of right and wrong as seen in the first couple of seasons. As is the case with so many escapist realities, survival is frequently becoming its most important aspect. Video games make evident the importance of survival almost innately, because the avatar has to survive to progress to the next section(s). Yet survival to these ends is not a reinforcement of pre-established hierarchies; survival becomes a lateral exploration and is liberated from the winner/loser binary. It would be a particularly pertinent point of enquiry to

further this study to see how this translates to online players against other people playing the game. Once there are other people within the game-reality, can ludic self-sacrifice exist? Or would that qualify as learning how the specifics of online play work? Would this bring about a shift back to a more 'established' model of self-sacrifice where one player would sacrifice themselves so that a different group or tactic could be more effective? This requires further research in what would feel like the natural progression of this thesis.

It is clear that the selected Lacanian frameworks are adept at identifying problems, pressures and deformities of neoliberal conditions; however, they are less adept at alleviating the symptoms they point out. The Deleuzian logic of desire as production, formulated in conjunction with Guattari, presents the notion of the schizophrenic as a force of liberation from capitalism. Fredric Jameson provides a counter argument to this idea in arguing that the temporally schizoid nature of postmodern culture is precisely what makes capitalism inescapable. This diverted the focus of this study's enquiry away from the difficulties of assuaging the appetite of contemporary capitalist society to the nuances and intricacies of the illusion of choice. And it is with choices of non-choice that neoliberalism can be further critiqued in video game texts. A further point of inquiry could extend the logic of Jameson and examine the extent to which self-sacrifice is a postmodern construct. How could the repetition and frequency of self-sacrifice be read as a cultural pastiche working towards a collective self-degradation outside of narrative (and therefore neoliberal) time frames? Could this be a meaningful counter argument to this study's Deleuzian reading of *The Walking Dead* or would it instead make for an alternative means of nuancing the illusion of choice in episodic texts?

9.5. Surviving Beyond Corporate Survival Weekends

There is a short extract written by Paul Verhaeghe that has been referred to in this thesis already in chapter 6, but it is worth returning to it to further unpick its sociopolitical implications. The extract encapsulates the confluence of performed survivalism and workplace neoliberalism. It gets at the twisted, knotted structure of neoliberal values that are at once deeply ironic but also highly exploitative and debilitating. It takes performance, meaning both pretending to be a certain way and the monitoring of individual ability, and deftly re-orientates it as a way of building relations, communications and companionship. The extract concerns corporate 'survival weekends' as an exercise in the contemporary horror of 'team building' and is as follows:

> Thus the feeling of 'belonging', so strongly promoted in the initial stage of the meritocracy, disappears completely. On top of this, staff are hired on a project-by-project basis, so that they have to work furiously and compete with one another right from the start in the hope that their contract will be extended. This system can only reward a few 'winners', giving rise to fear ('Will I keep my job?') and jealousy ('I bet he'll be kept on, he's always sucking up to the boss'). The lack of team spirit creates a need for team building, not infrequently - oh, irony - in the form of corporate survival (of-the-fittest) weekends. Solidarity makes way for mistrust. Loyalty to and identification with the enterprise are things in which employers must literally invest. (Verhaeghe 2014: 172-173)

The irony here comes from how workplace-community is undermined by an underlying competitive structure. This problem is recognised in higher managerial positions and is addressed by staging of competitive weekend-long microcosms (the team building exercises). Is it the case that corporate language simply cannot comprehend existence without competition? Perhaps a problem would require a different solution to the thing that caused the problem in the first place? It is like trying to alleviate a flood with more water. Or perhaps there is more thought to it, a kind of 'shock therapy'

whereby the competition of pretending to survive over the weekend makes employees more comfortable about actually striving for financial income through renewed contracts. But this is the wrong way around because the real 'shock therapy' is the everyday endeavour to perform. Perhaps the workplace is immune to the shocks, immune to the competitive beating and auditing to the point that simulated pangs of competitive performance become enlivening. This could be a similar method of social conditioning to that which gave rise to the popularity of zombie apocalypse discourse, that insistent question of survival. How will you internalise the perpetuation of your own existence into an outward competitive manifestation of your identity? Would you sacrifice yourself for another's survival? Because that would certainly (not) set you apart. This sense of simulated competition in an alternative environment is a similar sentiment to the ergodic self-sacrifices of chapter 8, a chance to fail without tangible repercussions, a chance to reclaim failure as a means of self-development. It is possible that corporate survivalism in the name of team building is something more sinister; the survival weekend originates from a mind that cannot fathom a community without competition or a conscious effort to desensitise the workplace of its various pressures, but from a position of mocking. As a wilful and debilitating proposition, the survival weekend is both an acknowledgement of the damaging and exploitative conditions that negated a sense of team spirit but also a means of exacerbating these conditions under the guise of a fun weekend away. It seems likely that any wilful or ironic sardonicism will likely prove unverifiable because those in power have become adept at sidestepping accusations of this kind and more. Self-sacrifice, as this study has concluded, is motivated by survivalism, but also overtly and sometimes dramatically reinstating the importance of survival. The logical next step for further scholastic enquiry is the study of what survival can mean in a broad range of texts and not merely ones that relate to self-sacrifice. The notion of surviving comes up so frequently in such a range of modern discourses that it is becoming harder and harder to simply accept it as the perpetuation of selfhood. It is becoming an insistent metaphor for something else, something deformed, something surely

neoliberal, something that hounds humanity, chasing it down as a swathe of undead chases live flesh.

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Filmography

28 Days Later, 2002. Directed by Danny Boyle. UK: DNA Films, UK Film Council.

[REC], 2007. Directed by Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza. Spain: Casteleo.

[REC] 2, 2009. Directed by Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza. Spain: Filmax Productions, Castelao.

[REC] 3: Genesis, 2012. Directed by Paco Plaza. Spain: Canal + España, Filmax.

[REC] 4: Apocalypse, 2014. Directed by Jaume Balagueró. Spain: Canal + España, Casteleo Productions .

Hidden (Caché), 2005. Directed by Mike Haneke. France: France 3 Cinéma, Canal+, Bavaria Film, Wega Film

Cargo, 2017. Directed by Ben Howling and Yolanda Ramke. Australia: Umbrella Entertainment, Addictive Pictures, Causeway Films, Head Gear Films.

Dawn of the Dead, 2004. Directed by Zach Snyder. USA: Strike Entertainment, New Amsterdam Entertainment.

Day of the Dead, 1985. Directed by George Romero. USA: Laurel Entertainment.

Extinction, 2015. Directed by Miguel Àngel Vivas. France, Spain, Hungary: Vertical Entertainment.

I am Legend, 2007. Directed by Francis Lawrence. USA: Warner Bros. Pictures.

I Walked with a Zombie, 1943. Directed by Jacques Tourneur. USA: RKO Radio Pictures.

Juan of the Dead (Juan de Los Muertos), 2011. Directed by Alejandro Brugués. Cuba, Spain: La Zanfoña Produccion, Producciones de la 5ta Avenida.

The Horde (La Horde), 2009. Directed by Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher. France: Capture [The Flag] Films.

Maggie, 2015. Directed by Henry Hobson. USA, Switzerland: Lionsgate, Roadside Attractions.

Night of the Living Dead, 1968. Directed by George Romero. USA: Continental Distributing.

Pandemic, 2016. Directed by John Suits. USA: XLrator Media.

Princess Mononoke (*Mononoke-hime*), 1997. Directed by Hayao Myazaki. Japan: Studio Ghibli.

Rammbock: Berlin Undead, 2010. Directed by Marvin Kren. Germany: ZDF.

Resident Evil: Extinction, 2007. Directed by Russel McCalhy: USA Canada, France, UK, Germany: Sony Pictures Releasing.

The Girl with all the Gifts, 2016. Directed by Colm McCarthy. UK: Warner Bros.

Train to Busan (*Busanhaeng*), 2016. Directed by Yeon Sang-ho. South Korea: Next Entertainment World.

White Zombie, 1932. Directed by Victor Halperin. USA: Halperin Productions.

World War Z, 2013. Directed by Marc Forster. Skydance Productions, Hemisphere Media Capital, GK Films, Plan B Entertainment, 2DUX² and Paramount Pictures.

Teleography

Fear the Walking Dead, 2015- present. Executive Producers: Robert Kirkman, David Alpert, Greg Nicotero, Gale Anne Hurd, Dave Erickson, Scott M. Gimple, Andrew Chambliss, Ian Goldberg. USA: AMC.

Game of Thrones, 2011- 2019. Executive Producers: David Benioff, D. B. Weiss, Carolyn Strauss, Frank Doelger, Bernadette Caulfield, Bryan Cogman, Miguel Sapochnik, David Nutter. USA: HBO.

The Walking Dead, 2011- present. Executive Producers: Frank Darabont, Gale Anne Hurd, David Alpert, Robert Kirkman, Charles H. Eglee, Glen Mazzara, Scott M. Gimple, Greg Nicotero, Tom Luse, Denise Huth, Angela Kang, Joseph Incaprera. USA: AMC.

Ludography

Dying Light, 2016. Directed by Paweł Marchewka and Adrian Ciszewski. Poland: Techland.

The Last of Us: Remastered, 2013. Directed by Bruce Straley, Neil Druckmann. USA: Naughty Dog.

Left for Dead, 2008. Designed by Mike Booth. USA: Valve, Valve South.

Resident Evil 3, 1999. Directed by Kazuhiro Aoyama. Japan: Capcom.