Living as a Zombie in Media (is the Only Way to Survive)

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Abstract

In this contribution, the argument is made that living in, rather than with, media not only turns us into zombies, but that such zombification provides us with adaptative advantages for survival in the 21st century. As (media) zombies, we would be better equipped to embrace collectivism over individualism; to be anti-hierarchical rather than organized top-down; and to engage our mutual (media) worlds with passion and fervor without necessarily having a specific plan or goal in mind. In the end, the future of humanity as media zombies comes down to the question: if this indeed is a zombie society, what would be the mediated equivalent be of chopping people's heads off? The answer can be found in practices such as hacking, the skillset of fandom, and in the morality of the collective.

Keywords: Media theory, social theory, zombies, materialism, vitalism, media ontology.

People use a lot of media more or less simultaneously a lot of the time - most of the time generally unaware of the fact that they are concurrently exposed to media (Deuze, 2012). This multiplication of mediated experiences contributes not only to a general lack of awareness of media in our lives, it also amplifies and accelerates an ongoing fusion of all domains of life (such as home, work, school, love, and play) with media. All this intense and immersive media use can be seen as turning us into helpless addicts, slaves to machines – *zombies*. We are zombies in that we mindlessly succumb to the drive of our devices; we are zombies because we use media in ways that erase our distinctiveness as individuals as we record and remix ourselves and each other into media, and our society zombifies as we navigate it – willingly or involuntarily – augmented by virtualizing technologies.

In this paper, I first aim to show that we already live in a zombie society where we live in symbiosis with technologies that have fused with lived experience to the extent that

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distinctions between organic and technological life have disappeared (or become meaningless). Second, I argue that living in media as zombies – in a media life – can in fact be considered beneficial in terms of our chances for survival, and opportunities for more or less new types of social engagement. Cases such as the global Occupy movement and the Arab Spring are used to support this thesis, as is recent scholarship on the significance of zombies as the 'monster of the moment' at the start of the 21st century.[2]

Media (R)evolution

Research on how people use media runs paramount throughout both the industry and academy, crossing numerous sectors and disciplines, all contributing to an overwhelming array of stories, studies, reports, journal articles, and books documenting how, generally, people around the world use more and more media all the time. We live our lives in a context of more, faster, all-encompassing, profoundly pervasive and omnipresent media. Anthropologist Keith Hart uses proposes a 'revolutionary' take on our lives in media:

> "We are living through the first stages of a world revolution [...] It is a machine revolution, of course: the convergence of telephones, television and computers in a digital system whose most visible symbol is the internet. It is a social revolution, the formation of a world society with means of communication adequate at last to expressing universal ideas [...] It is an existential revolution, transforming what it means to be human and how each of us relates to the rest of humanity" (2009: 24).

A December 2010 survey across 22 countries by the Pew Global Attitudes Project documents steady growth in computer and cell phone use everywhere, concluding that "[i]n regions around the world - and in countries with varying levels of economic development - people who use the internet are using it for social networking."[3] The 2011 GlobalWebIndex

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[2]   This argument is part of a larger project into 'media life' as primarily documented in Deuze (2011, 2012).
[3]   Source: http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1830/social-networking-computer-cell-phone-usage-around-the-world.

report by British consultancy Trendstream[4] - based on aggregated market research from 23 countries - suggests people's media use on a global scale moves towards what it calls 'real-time' and 'social' technologies. The global uptake of online social networks is part of a larger trend in the dance between media and everyday life towards a predominance of always-on, interconnected artifacts and activities that become the foundation for the arrangement of human sociality. Wired magazine's contributing editor Gary Wolf accelerates such assertions in his take on what famed media philosopher Marshall McLuhan would have made of our time of ubiquitous portable and networked communication technologies, deliberately invoking media life in the headline – "The Medium Is Life" - of his argument:

> "Humanism temporarily survived the era of electronic media only through the act of turning on a device [...] But when a medium is coincident with life, the last refuge for humanism is gone. [...] The long story of humanism — by which I mean the emergence of individual consciousness as a byproduct of our language and literature — comes to an end when we return, futuristically, to doing everything by hand."[5]

Beyond the feverishness of such predictions it can safely be said that the omnipresence of media in general and mobile media in particular does produce and reflect new forms of sociability. Across the field, studies support the conclusion that immersively mediated connections produce cultural diversity and particularity as much as they foster allegiance and traditionalism. In a wide ranging review of studies in Japan, North America, and Europe, Kakuko Miyata, Barry Wellman and Jeffrey Boase (2005) see a "mobile-ization" of society, where mobile connectivity increases both the volume and velocity of communication on a global as well as local scale. In the 2010 overview of the World Internet Project (documenting computer and internet use in close to twenty countries), researchers come to the conclusion that in what they label "a new digital media ecology" people do not just spend much more

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[4]   See: http://globalwebindex.net.
[5]   Source: http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/03/ff_tablet_essays/4#mcluhan.

time communicating than consuming - their communicative behavior takes place primarily within the context of "peer-to-peer sociality" (Cardoso, Cheong and Cole, 2010: 7-8). Claims about a wholesale reordering of society and the social through people's immersion in media run paramount throughout the literature. Generally speaking, it seems that our media lives work to undermine institutional hierarchies, and introduce mobility in social relationships. Accelerating a process pre-dating internet and mobile telecommunications, it becomes paramount to understand the role of media in people's lives - perhaps not so much as how they change us (including the ways we relate to each other), but rather to explore the kind of society we are co-creating in media. In other words: what are we exactly, as people, when we live in media?

"We're All Fucking Zombies"

In this claim by Gawker-blogger Hamilton Nolan about what becomes of us as we live in meida, zombification is introduced as a social problem. This seems not without merit. In August 2010 the British Automobile Association (AA) issued a formal warning to the general public about the dangers of road zombies: people sharing the road while listening to music on headphones or using a mobile phone. Inspired by a similar metaphorical concern about zombies, Assistant Surgeon General Ali Khan of the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on May 16, 2011 posted a 'Zombie Apocalypse Preparedness Guide' on its website, drily informing people about what services it offers in case of these (and other) emergencies:

> "If zombies did start roaming the streets, CDC would conduct an investigation much like any other disease outbreak. CDC would provide technical assistance to cities, states, or international partners dealing with a zombie infestation. This assistance might include consultation, lab testing and analysis, patient management and care, tracking of contacts, and infection control (including isolation and

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quarantine)."[6]

This tongue-in-cheek reference to a potential zombie apocalypse made waves in media as word of the announcement spread virally across social networking sites and got picked up by major news organizations. Banking on this success, the CDC's newly formed Zombie Task Force followed up by announcing an online user-generated video contest.

The association between media and zombies is not new, and should be traced to recurring moral panics on the influence of media throughout history – be it maps, books, newspapers, advertisements, television, or today's internet and mobile telecommunications. However, one could argue that today's level of media immersion is rather unprecedented. As Manuel Castells (2010) documents, a rather dramatic global shift from mass communication to mass self-communication is taking place, vastly increasing our engagement and involvement in media, and through media with each other. It is hardly surprising that we, when trying to grasp this shift, mesh organic terms (such as viruses, swarm intelligence, and hive minds) with inanimate objects (computers, hardware and software, wired and wireless connections). Conceptually fusing the (a)live and dead seems appropriate for a critical understanding of media life. We are all zombies, in that the boundaries between us and our media – between humans and machines – have blurred, our lives run concurrent with technologies, and the metaphors we live by complicate categorical distinctions between living and dead matter.

Media Are Zombies, Too

A reference to the living dead in the context of a complete mediatization of everyday life is not entirely without merit, as Jussi Parikka notes about one of the slightly more unsettling consequences of a media life: living with "the return of dangerous toxins and other residue from supposedly immaterial information technologies – hundreds of millions of electronic devices discarded annually, most of which are still working" (2010).[7] A media life comes with endless graveyards of often

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6   See: http://www.bt.cdc.gov/socialmedia/zombies_blog.asp.
7   Source: http://mediacartographies.blogspot.com/2010/07/zombie-media-on-art-methods-and-

still-working mobile phones, personal computers, chips and circuits, wires, and controllers. Recognizing the severity of this (un)dead media issue, in 2008 the United Nations, together with a host of other organizations (including the US Environmental Protection Agency), started the Solving The E-waste Problem (STEP) initiative.[8] This program considers e-waste (any kind of electronic equipment, including TVs, computers, mobile phones, home entertainment and stereo systems) a global problem growing more rapidly every year because of the relentless pace of product innovations and replacement in electronics, in conjunction with ever-increasing worldwide demand for media. It is furthermore a global (and not a municipal or otherwise local) problem because of the complexity and cost involved with safely disposing the many hazardous materials that make up media. The value of e-waste is partly determined by the fact that many of the parts are still working or can be made to work. Our devices, how we use them, and the organization of everyday life such activities engender are, by virtue of the technologies and techniques involved, intrinsically temporary and short-lived. At the same time, our life in media forever summons a past that can never be regained as well as a past that never goes away - our media are always already *zombie media.*

On the level of praxeology – what people are actually doing (when living their lives in media) – scholarship tends to be exemplified by a tendency to keep media and what people do with media firmly separate. A challenge to this paradigm comes from Sonia Livingstone and Leah Lievrouw, who define media as "information and communication technologies and their associated social contexts, incorporating: the artifacts or devices that enable and extend our abilities to communicate; the communication activities or practices we engage in to develop and use these devices; and the social arrangements or organizations that form around the devices and practices" (2004: 7). The strength of this definition is that it includes existing approaches that would externalize media, while recognizing how media have become an integral part of everyday life.

As devices with distinct genealogies, media meet the criteria of evolutionary design: in the course of media history our artifacts have exponentially multiplied –

media.html.

[8] See: http://www.step-initiative.org; the US partnership is detailed at the EPA website:
http://www.epa.gov/international/toxics/ewaste.html.

every year there are more, not fewer media at our disposal – and these artifacts become increasingly diverse and complex all the time. Media converge and diverge at a rapid pace, not necessarily progressing along neat linear trajectories. In this process different media 'species' become dominant not exclusively based on the objective quality of their features – their successful survival better explained by fitness with their environment.

Within the contemporary media-centered household, media can best be considered as comprehensively fused with the domestic ecosystem, both in terms of their artefactual existence as well as regarding the way media get used to construct and maintain relationships among the people involved. In this context Thorsten Quandt and Thilo von Pape take a distinct biophilosophical route through the media home, considering this common everyday living arrangement as a *mediatope*: the social, physical and technological living environment of media (2010: 332). For more than a year Quandt and Von Pape followed one hundred German households (through interviews, observations, and surveys), showing how media move through the household in flocks, how the identities of various devices change over time, how younger and older media fight for survival in the home environment, and therefore all have distinct and dynamic life cycles "connected to the life of the users themselves" (ibid., 339). The intimate interrelationship between the lives of people and their media "paints a picture of an evolving, living media world within the domestic environment of the household" (ibid. 343; italics added). Once seen as inseparable from the domestic sphere of everyday operations, media have clearly become part of the day-to-day coordination of both family and personal life. In research done in the US by UCLA's Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELF), and across Europe by the scholars involved in the European Media and Technology in Everyday Life (EMTEL) and the EU Kids Online networks, media feature prominently as sites of struggle and negotiation of power and authority in the family home. In doing so, media add a certain dynamism and mobility to the daily rhythm of life, while at the same time extending and amplifying existing networks and ways of doing things.

All in all I contend that the evolution of media as artifacts, their everyday uses, and their role in the arrangements of people's lives (as individuals and as part of

extended community, family and peer networks) suggest an increasingly seamless and altogether ambient lived experience of them. The increasing inseparability of media and the lifeworld necessitates, in our theorizing of the contemporary social, a zombie perspective that respects the obsoleteness of the alive-dead (or: man-machine) binary.

Zombie Creativity

At the heart of understanding people's mass self-communicative and deeply immersive engagement in media is the reconstruction of the "self as source", as Shyam Sundar codifies the mediation between technology and psychology at work in media life (2008). Based on his experimental work on people's media use, Sundar higlights the importance of our own selves in the co-evolution of technology and psychology. This trend prompted Time magazine to make all of us – "YOU" – as its 'Person of the Year' in 2006, featuring a front cover with a YouTube screen functioning as a mirror. The centrality of ourselves as having to take responsibility for co-creating the world and our roles in it through (the way we use) media cannot be underestimated. As numerous observers note, while people using media are at once and instantaneously connected with generally large and multiple dynamic groups and networks, they are also increasingly ascribed with a deeply individualized and seemingly self-centered value system. Thomas de Zengotita (2005) offers how the universal "mediated self" (7) lives in a "little MeWorld" (75), automatically attuned to the solipsistic idea that everyone has her/his own reality. Australian media researchers Yangzi Sima and Peter Pugsley (2010) signal in this context the rise of a distinct Me Culture in China, engendered by an increased emphasis on self-expression and identity exhibition in media. According to De Zengotita, this mediated self is a flattered self (2005: 7), endlessly stimulated by at least the possibility of being incessantly addressed in media. Interpellation in media, for example, happens by being liked, poked, and tagged on Facebook, or by being singled out in advertisements geared towards you.

Writing in the Winter 2005 issue of The New Atlantis magazine, Christine Rosen sees in the way people use media to both consume and produce information for and about themselves evidence of an emerging age of "egocasting", where sophisticated technologies give us "the illusion of perfect control", inescapably leading to a

"thoroughly personalized and extremely narrow pursuit of one's personal taste" (52). For Rosen, contemporary media artifacts and what we do with them make us forget about our fellow human beings in general, as they allow people to focus only on things of interest to them. At the same time, it bears pointing out that the vast majority of people's use of media is indeed social, in that media are used to connect to other people (and their issues) at anytime and (in an increasingly mobile context) anyplace. When the self becomes source it therefore does not necessarily reduce the world to a solipsistic experience.

When people's lives move into media, their lifeworld both collapses in media, and it simultaneously gets stretched across (potentially) all other lifeworlds. Zygmunt Bauman notes in this context of mediated witnessing of self and others that "we are presently moving from the era of pre-allocated 'reference groups' into the epoch of 'universal comparison', in which the destination of individual self-constructing labours is endemically and incurably underdetermined" (2000: 7). Mark Poster (1999) suggests that it is exactly such "underdetermination" that is a typical feature of today's media. Our identities and experiences in an increasingly interconnected and networked media space are always open to intervention, to redaction, to be altered in all kinds of different ways.

The symbiosis of the living and the dead – of life and media – can further be wielded as an explanatory tool when we relate zombies to new social movements such as the Occupy Together protests across the United States (and elsewhere) of 2011, the riots in the UK earlier that year, and ongoing protests in Arab countries. News reporters, technology pundits and other observers have baptized such major upheavals at the start of the 21st century as a "Twitter Revolution" (referring to Iran in The Atlantic on June 18, 2010[9]), "Facebook Revolution" (referring to Egypt in TIME magazine on January 24, 2011[10]), "The YouTube Revolutions" (in a headline about the entire Arab world in Foreign Policy magazine on March 30, 2011[11]), or most comprehensively yet: the "Facebook-Twitter-YouTube Revolution" (referring to the entire region in the

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[9]   See: http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/06/evaluating-irans-twitter-revolution/58337.

[10]   See: http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2044142,00.html.

[11]   Source: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/30/the_youtube_revolutions

Huffington Post on February 1, 2011[12]). This in turn prompted numerous commentators to dispute social media's role in causing the widespread protests and calls for change in the Arab world. Yet the protests, riots (and subsequent clean-ups as in the case of the UK, using hashtag #reclaimthestreets) around the world do have certain properties that remind one of zombies:

▪ first, they tend to be based on social movements without leaders, lacking clear hierarchical structures, and generally having no clear goals. If anything, the sheer diversity of goals seem to cancel each other out;

▪ second, they involve people from all walks of life: from East to West, North to South, black and white, men and women, old and young - again negating distinct classifications;

▪ finally, not only does the social arrangement of these protests rely heavily on the use of media (which in turn enable the active involvement of people not necessarily present) - they seem similarly infectious and viral as media can be. As Steve Anderson, director of non-profit organization OpenMedia, writes in a column for the Canadian weblog *Rabble* (on 1 November 2011): "[the Occupy movement] feels like an ongoing space infused with web values and practices. Their structure of participation mirrors that of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia [...] Will it last? I have no idea, but I think these social practices are addictive and contagious."[13]

Combining observations about a zombification of society with the way people around the world not only live their lives *in* media, but behave *as* media in public (which, given media life, also means: in private), the zombie contagiously moves beyond metaphor. Theoretically, the possibility of a world turning into a zombie society in media forces us to rethink the kind of traditional categorizations so readily applied in media studies as well as popular discourse about media. The prime examples of such all-too-easy labeling are media and life. What if we can, through the idea of (media) zombies, move beyond physicalist readings of (media) life - that emphasize a more or less immutable thingness of media and disempower us to do anything about our lives

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12   Source: http://www.politicsdaily.com/2011/02/01/mobs-and-democracy-the-facebook-twitter-youtube-revolution.
13   Source: http://rabble.ca/columnists/2011/11/occupy-movement-making-world-more-web.

and the world we live in - instead deliberately opting for a vitalist position?

Everything (And Everyone) Zombie

The possibility of zombies makes for endless debates among philosophers, who find in what American philosopher Daniel Dennett calls the zombic hunch fertile ground to question whether there is more to mankind than the sum of its parts[14]. Dennett in particular regularly revisits this debate in an attempt to show that his competitor-colleagues, who hold on to some kind of distinction between mind and matter, do not seem to have empirical evidence for their claims. At the risk of oversimplifying an complex issue, the key to the ongoing zombic debate is our investment in separating the phenomenal and the physical. This is where Nolan's use of the zombie concept comes in: when we live in media, one way or another, we become less aware of our surroundings, less tuned in to our senses, and thus: more like lifeless automatons.

The centrality of consciousness as a feature of humanity implicated in media use is delicately noted by David Buckingham in his assessment of the vast literature on media and society: "[i]f these writers do not see all technologies as determining consciousness, they nevertheless seem to believe that media do" (2000: 42; italics in original). Michael Newman similarly outlines a long history of scholarship and lay theoretization on the perceived dangers of television, internet and mobile telephony - all media that at one point or another were (and still are) seen as suppressing active attention and turning media users into zombies (2010: 589). Such squaring of media with moral and intellectual decline serves to maintain the social order, especially when it comes to the expert elite and anyone who may come to challenge their position in society. As Newman points out, there does not seem to be much evidence to suggest a causal connection between a culture's media and social devolution. Similarly, Katelyn McKenna and John Bargh argue in a review of the implications of the internet for personality and social psychology that "the internet does not, contrary to current popular opinion, have by itself the power or ability to control people, to turn them into addicted zombies, or make them dispositionally sad or lonely (or, for that matter, happy or

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[14]   Source: Dennett, Daniel (1999) The zombic hunch: extinction of an intuition? Royal Institute of Philosophy Millennial Lecture; online text at URL: http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/zombic.htm.

popular), and neither does the telephone, or television, or movies" (2000: 72).

One generally assumes that the ultimate human part determining consciousness is the brain. It is perhaps no surprise that Max Brooks' propitious book *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003) promises that, in order to commit suicide as a zombie or to efficiently remove a zombie threat, all one has to do is eliminate the brain. As Seth Grahame-Smith elegantly states in the opening of his remix of Jane Austen and zombies (titled Pride and Prejudice and Zombies): "[i]t is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains" (2009: 7). Decapitation seems the preferred method for zombie disposal if one follows the films by specialist George A. Romero (creator of a series of instructional fare starting with "Night of the Living Dead" in 1968, via his most successful "Dawn of the Dead" in 1978 leading up to "Survival of the Dead" in 2009). Yet, as many would argue, there is more to the brain than information processing. And if that is true, whatever the extra piece of the puzzle of life is, it apparently makes the difference between being a zombie and not being a zombie. More to the point: you are a zombie when no one is home inside your head. This puts a premium on one's own individual experience and making sense of the world as the determining quality of existence.

If our entire experience of the world is indefinitely unique to our own understanding of it, we can never know whether we are the only real human beings on a planet otherwise populated by zombies. On the other hand: such a philosophical stance makes each and everyone of us quite special. As Dennett writes about his fellow philosophers' often-stated reverence for the mysterious pathways and processes in the individual brain as the ultimate "Medium" producing consciousness: "the message is: there is no medium" (1993)[15]. Here, Dennett invokes Marshall McLuhan's 1964 expression "the medium is the message" to question whether the brain is extraordinary and, more ominously, to challenge whether each of us is indeed really so special.

You Are Not Special

Pertinent to my concerns about zombification and media life is the powerful paradigmatic potential of the zombie to provide a point of view that moves beyond all-

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[15]   Source: http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/msgisno.htm.

to-easy categorizations (such as maintaining a futile discongruity between media and life). Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry explore a theory of zombies as the harbingers of a truly posthuman condition in their Zombie Manifesto (2008). The zombie embodies an immanent state not governed by traditional dichotomies or dialectics such as between subject and object generally, or media and life more particularly, because the zombie's "irreconcilable body" (87) is neither living nor dead - it can only be understood as inseparable into distinct terms (95). In this respect, their embrace of the zombie to break through widespread ways of classifying and understanding social reality is reminiscent of Ulrich Beck's challenge to 'zombie sociology' (originally voiced in the early 1990s), using as examples the categories of the nation and the local:

> "If it is true that the meaning of the national and the local is changing through internalized globalization, then the most important methodological implication for all social sciences is that normal social sciences categories are becoming zombie categories [...] Zombie categories are living dead categories, which blind the social sciences to the rapidly changing realities inside the nation-state containers, and outside as well" (2002: 24).

It is in this spirit that Lauro and Embry zombify categories such as mind and matter, reducing them to zombie concepts that live on in name but have died in terms of their usefulness. As a lifeform the zombie is not some kind of remix between the empty containers of dead and (a)live life - as it is both, it is neither. For Lauro and Embry, thinking through the zombie idea reveals how it disrupts, unsettles, and ultimately destroys the models people have carefully built to maintain the status quo.

The *Zombie Manifesto* highlights global capitalism's reliance on people seeing themselves as unique individuals who, through conspicuous consumption, need to express that individuality in perpetuity. The zombie erases such a sense of personality - replacing it with what Shaka Paul McGlotten (2011) describes as an *impersonal sociality* - and thus calls into question "which is more terrifying: our ultimate separation from our fellow humans, or the dystopic fantasy of a swarm organism" (Lauro and Embry, 2008: 101). This provocation is picked up in Jussi Parikka's Insect Media

(2010), where he discusses the widespread use of entomological concepts to describe, analyze and understand people's behaviors in media life. Parikka invokes zombies to propose a more inclusive way to understand forms of life:

> "the biophilosophy of the twenty-first century should contextualize itself on such forms of the headless animality of insect societies or the new intensive meaning in states bordering life - the lifelike death of zombies. This biophilosophical moment [...] is characterized by a logic alternative to that of the prior approaches to thinking of life, namely the three modes of soul, meat, and pattern. Hence, such a biophilosophy also suggests a new way of understanding materiality not based on a substance or a form but as a temporal variation of affective assemblages" (47).

From a relatively benign and sometimes ironic use of zombies one can move to an emerging field of zombie studies attempting to go beyond previously partitioned paradigms - dividing the world between nature, humanity and technology, parsing people into body and soul, dichotomizing development into nature and nurture, structure and agency, or product and process. Either way, it is perhaps safe (and at the very least uncannily inspiring) to say that the social order of our lives lived in media has all the hallmarks of a zombie society, as born out the research on how people around the world generally use media. The emerging human condition is fused with the material conditions of its immediate environment - both biological and technological. The question is, what this altogether human yet zombified society in media life looks like, and how it feels.

I cannot help but questioning what kind of society is produced by the ability of everyone to know each other primarily through mediated connections, data storage and transfer, and the sharing of private lives in public archives. This is not necessarily another way of restating the famous 1993 cartoon by Peter Steiner in The New Yorker, captioned "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog" - it is also its exact opposite: due to the lack of anonymity as we are, for example, continuously captured by our digital shadow, everyone can know you're a dog. In people's endeavors to position

themselves uniquely online – most visibly via social media like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter – the zombie society in media seems one where lives are lived in public, where everything and everyone can be (and often is) monitored, where we are all alone yet intricately connected. Such a networked and peer-based sociality in media produces a society that needs to find out about itself on an ongoing basis in order to socially function. Our tendency to overshare is perhaps best understood as a vital adaptation to a rapidly evolving social mediaspace, rather than a regrettable or generation-specific social problem. In the process of adapting to our co-creative mediated social reality, it becomes crucial to identify and develop skills and competences needed to survive and thrive in a world society benchmarked by permanently recorded, overshared, instantly archived, publicly accessible and redactable computer-mediated communicational bonds.

Discussion

Earlier celebration or apprehension about increasingly intimate human-machine relationships perhaps should make way for a more subtle appreciation of inseparable media in that we overwhelmingly ignore them, take them for granted, accept that they are hardwired into our social systems. In other words: media are essential to the successful survival of human societies and do not necessarily reduce the social to the technological, but blend such categories to an inevitably zombified state. Hacking, as personified in the character of Hiro Protagonist, is the ultimate survival skill, albeit one not necessarily premised on mastering computer code. Programming and hacking can also be seen as discursive devices - ways of making sense differently from what is expected or predicted. Similar media life survival tactics would include, as Mimi Ito notes (2005: 31), a practice of media mixing as the technical form of hypersociality, and what Lev Manovich similarly advocates as "people's tactics of bricolage, reassembly, and remix" (2009: 324) in media life.

Although people may not always realize it, many of their activities in media have a similar creative quality - from the cutting and pasting of texts, the customization of wallpapers and ringtones, the cropping and editing of images, and the building of

music playlists to more advanced forms of mixing, editing, and otherwise repurposing of media. Advocating a mindful approach to such often-mundane practices, numerous authors and educators enthusiastically embrace a convergence culture as the appropriate ethos of a society in media. Henry Jenkins (2006) is among the more high profile international advocates for people's right to freely sample and remix media. British media sociologist David Gauntlett takes an additional step by arguing that with open access to tools to further co-creativity and to platforms to make their voices heard (beyond the constraints of corporately controlled platforms), "people are happier, more engaged with the world, and more likely to develop and learn" (2011: 226). Basing his argument on the works of Austrian philosopher-priest Ivan Illich, Gauntlett passionately advocates a convivial engagement with society in media - not exclusively through the planned process of multimedia conglomerates and commercial software, but through the making, appropriating and, in effect, hacking of tools in order to care for and about others. Unknowingly, it seems Gauntlett and Jenkins have already become key intellectuals of our zombie existence.

A blend between people's timeless tendency to make the environment their own by tweaking and adapting it, and contemporary media's qualities of opening their infrastructures, contents, and services up to intra-action seems to provide an encouraging road ahead. In this context people's programming, hacking, remixing, and other essential media practices can be considered to be media life manifestations of Jean Baudrillard's prescient (1981) call to action in a media-saturated world:

"The more hegemonic the system, the more the imagination is struck by the smallest of its reversals. The challenge, even infinitesimal, is the image of a chain failure. [...] Theoretical violence, not truth, is the only resource left us."[16]

Co-creating and remixing are not just an ontological move, as in making yourself and making the world your own. These are also epistemological acts, in that they necessarily involve the anticatharsis of zombie ways of knowing and doing things: our media mixing potentially destroys the reigning model without offering a

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[16]   Source: http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/simulacra-and-simulations-xviii-on-nihilism.

replacement (Lauro and Embry, 2008: 91, 96). Society in media life is grounded in a post-media condition: there is no outside to media. Perhaps in the movies there is - in Romero's films all we need to do is barricade ourselves in shopping malls (or on islands) and fight off the zombie hordes by shooting them or (as in Stephenson's novel) chopping their heads off. This escape is, however, an illusion - just as the Delete key on a computer offers only an illusion of impermanence. We live in media forever - and in that eternity, it is up to us as individuals to find a way to hack the system together by committing, in the first instance, theoretical violence upon the contemporary interpretation of capitalism, on the corporate takeover of internet, on the way interfaces make us censor and delete parts of our selves in order to fit in and give expression to a commodified cult of individuality. In other words: by becoming zombies.

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