Building Dreams from Nightmares: Structuration and Sustainability in *The Walking Dead*

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Introduction

Rick Grimes wakes up in the hospital, sustaining injuries from a shootout. It is eerily silent – no nurse or doctor to inform him of his progress, no family members waiting. The hospital is in disarray: scattered papers, shattered tiles, electric cords hanging from the ceiling, and non-functioning phones. Pale hands reach out from behind double doors with 'Don't open dead inside' painted on them, supposedly secured by a chain ('Days Gone Bye,' 2010). Outside, he sees bodies wrapped in tarps, an abandoned helicopter and a half-corpse snarling. He is in a living nightmare. Rick is the protagonist of *The Walking Dead* (*TWD*) comics, illustrated by Tony Moore and written by Robert Kirkman, and the more popular TV show, which is the main focus of this analysis. Through applying Anthony Giddens' structuration theory to *TWD*, this article will examine the TV show's use of post-apocalyptic sustainability to demonstrate our current world's need to focus on the solutions that sustainability has to offer for the collective good. Through exorcising nostalgia, finding new roles, and creatively utilising resources, *TWD* depicts a post-apocalyptic world that offers our own post COVID-19 world a glimpse at a more sustainable future.

Zombie Television Tropes

Nostalgia is a major source of conflict for characters living in the post-apocalypse. This is particularly visible in zombie-based television shows, like *TWD*, that mirror how the world was, is, or could be. On a pessimistic note, Annalee Newitz states that 'Zombies are like the memories of terrible events that we've tried to stash away, tried to forget. And they're not just one memory – they're our mass memory of lives lost, homes destroyed, nations crushed' (2010). In essence, the visceral reaction to zombie media comes from the reminder of what was lost and can still be lost. On an optimistic note, Greg Pollock argues, 'the imaginative worlds opened up by zombie stories might give us new and better ways for re-drawing boundaries…particularly concerning what kind of "life" we want to, and are able to, foster' (2011: 171). Similarly, Clint Jones

considers some zombie narratives' lessons learnt through trials and tribulations eventually result in hope (2020: 2). Learning lessons, often the hard way, is central to *TWD*.

Zombie-television showrunners incorporate similar tropes with unique differences to remain competitive in the media market. Despite being a comedy, Syfy's *Z Nation* (2014-2018) presents various zombies resulting from a virus, scientific experimentation, natural disasters, as well as a possible cure. *Daybreak* (2019-), also based on comics, feels like *Mad Max* (1979) with high schoolers. Less violent zombie shows – *Resurrection* (2013-2015), *The Returned* (2015), *Manifest* (2018-), etc. – feature late family members returning as they were before dying. *TWD*'s own spin-offs vary slightly. *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015-) is set in the urban west coast and focuses mostly on the Clark family when the apocalypse begins. In *World Beyond* (2020-), 10 years after *TWD*, two teenage sisters set out to rescue their father from a regime; for them, zombies are more of an accepted nuisance. In the original *TWD*, however, zombie lore is non-existent, leaving survivors unsure of how to deal with zombies and their roles in this strange new world. Moreover, the stark contrast between past and present brings great nostalgic suffering, necessitating ways to cope with the new reality. For the humans caught up in the various zombie apocalypses and for viewers at home during a pandemic, the future may seem bleak. Yet in *TWD*, the possibility of a rapidly-changing world may not be wholly negative since catastrophe is often a birthplace for new beginnings in post-apocalyptic media. Survivors' actions toward establishing and maintaining a sustainable community constitute the essence of various types of social systems and structures.

A key concept of analysing zombie texts is sustainability. Despite the wealth of criticism on zombies, few critics connect zombies to sustainability; even fewer directly tie zombies to structuration. To define sustainability, we refer to the World Commission on Environment and Development decision in 1987: 'Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' Linking this to zombie narratives, Erik Assadourian states, 'The good news is that people are already recruiting zombies to draw attention to issues of overconsumption and unsustainability' (2009). Patrick D. Murphy lists other serious concerns: 'conflict over natural resources, corporate excesses and environmental degradation, public indifference to environmental abuse, inept or corrupt state agencies, environmental racism and

climate justice' (2018: 45). Murphy's correlation between the lack of sustainability and bad leadership impact the real world, but it is even more apparent in *TWD*.

Structuration theory is another viable lens for examining post-apocalyptic media. In the late 1970s to early 1980s, to somewhat reconcile the social and physical sciences divide, sociologist Anthony Giddens devised a structuration theory: '"structure" is regarded as rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction; institutionalised features of social systems have structural properties in the sense that relationships are stabilised across time and space' (1984: xxxi). This involves analysis and understanding of capable 'actors' (agents) and how they 'produce and reproduce through social interactions' (1984: 25-6). Though underused within zombie discourse, researchers today still refer to structuration theory: John R. Ehrenfeld and Andrew J. Hoffman cover sustainability in general (2013: 77); Melissa Lavin and Brian M. Lowe discuss hierarchy in *TWD* (2015: 122). These sources signify the importance of structuration and the sustainability, which only becomes more acute in zombie lore.

In terms of Giddens' actors, we argue that zombies are capable individuals or catalysts since humans' efforts to maintain and sustain their lives are in respect to the zombies. Sustainability, therefore, becomes a major theme in this interpretation of *TWD* by means of the dual nature of the world as it *is* versus the world as it *was*. The 'world as it was' is characterised by pride, greed, excess and consumption. The 'world as it is' is restructured by fear, purpose, ethics and resourcefulness that all imply sustainability for survival. Lavin and Lowe note:

> As our characters spend more time dislocated in the post-apocalyptic, their desperation and disconnection from previous society increases. This allows greater flexibility of social roles, and in particular, the relationship between social location – a person's complicated and nuanced demographic category, which shapes their interactions and opportunities – and power. (2015: 119)

Along this line, *TWD* presents various social structures across the course of the show, each with its own rules and implications. In the *TWD* world, rules and resources are scarce, and meta-systems (judicial/legal, health, communication and military/political systems) no longer exist, leaving rules to be defined by surviving groups. Those who try to survive must do so consciously of the sustainable social structure they inhabit and co-create at varying levels across societies.

Whilst other social structures emerge, develop and fade amongst the survivors, two major social agents exist in these structures: survivors and zombies. Zombies depend upon survivors as

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sustenance. This relationship is not mutual as zombies are feared and despised, serving as bait, protection or obstacles, though they further motivation for sustainability. For survivors, water, food, firearms and ammunition, transportation and fuel and other items that essentially prolong and maintain life form the elements of the social structure.

TWD demonstrates that in the apocalypse, the more diverse groups tend to have a better chance for survival. Early seasons relate to survivors trying to make sense of their new realities before; later seasons show more fundamentalist societies. The main group, led by former sheriff Rick Grimes, traverses from campsites to houses, from prisons to false sanctuaries, churches, hospitals, schools and warehouses and eventually settle in Alexandria, Hilltop and the Kingdom. The more conventional groups of the new societies are still trying to grasp some semblance of the old life: those at Hershel's farmhouse, Woodbury, Hilltop, Oceanside and Alexandria as opposed to non-conventional societies such as Terminus, The Kingdom (though closer to normal than the other two) and the Scavengers. Few groups, such as the Saviors and Whisperers, resort to a gang mentality, implementing violence to control their own and nearby groups. In terms of fundamentalists, the Whisperers have 'gone native,' living minimally, relying on zombies for protection and epitomising survival of the fittest. However, survivors are not safe from zombies or one another, despite where they settle. Adding on to possible dangers, a high dependence upon nostalgia can hinder advancement in the zombie apocalypse, leaving survivors to focus on loss over gain. By exploring the redistribution of authoritative resources, the renegotiation of authority and rules within post-apocalypse and allocative resources with the need to consume, this article aligns the journey within *TWD* to an exploration of real-world concerns. Examining related concepts endemic to structuration theory in our application to *TWD* demonstrates how 'new worlds' can indeed be better and more sustainable.

The Structuration Process in *TWD*: Authoritative Resources

Under structuration theory, Giddens provides two types of resources to consider: 'authoritative resources refer[ring] to…transformative capacity generating command over persons or actors [while] allocative resources refer[s] to capabilities or…forms of transformative capacity generating command over objects, goods or material phenomena' (1984: 33). Hongping Lian and Bo Yin emphasise authoritative resources are non-material while allocative resources are materially involved in the production or realisation of power (2020: 618). In terms of

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authoritative resources, survival in *TWD* is dependent upon finding one's purpose or skill set. Lavin and Lowe write, 'Just like in real life, characters from the post-apocalyptic society of *TWD* have different levels of power, status and responsibility…groups organize by reproducing these inequalities and differences' (2015: 118). These survivors 'dole out responsibilities' (118) as well as engage in 'efforts to reduce sources of risk' (122). Thus, finding a suitable role is necessary for characters coping with new, traumatic circumstances.

Naturally, the roles of different people, places and things may have changed since new-world needs are more pragmatic. Some had beneficial skills pre-apocalypse, the most valuable being the healers. Each surviving group has one or at least understands their importance: Hershel is a retired veterinarian; Denise and Siddiq are former medical students; teenage Enid of Alexandria trains in medicine. Dante brags to humble Siddiq that doctors are still 'gods' in the new world ('Lines We Cross,' 2019). The second level of most valuable roles belongs to the builders: engineers, mechanics, manual labourers and blue-collar workers or people with different jobs who simply gleaned such skills in the new world. Deanna's husband, Reg, designed Alexandria. Rick already has a capable team with scientifically-minded Eugene, ex-military Abraham and street-smart Rosita who learnt to do things like fix cars by watching men who considered her too delicate for such things ('The Other Side,' 2017). Again, it is shown that a diverse group is advantageous, if not necessary, for survival.

In terms of roles, characters must regress to a hunter-gatherer mentality. Daryl, a true survivalist, carries a crossbow and other hunting tools. Others unafraid of using guns or weapons (Rick, Michonne, etc.) excel as hunters. Most have tossed aside their political convictions and learnt to use guns. Surviving groups, such as Alexandria who condemn violence, must learn to defend themselves when enemies besides zombies appear. Then there are gatherers and scavengers who glean supplies or information. Glenn from Rick's group is a former pizza-delivery boy familiar with Atlanta city routes ('Guts,' 2010). Aaron and Eric scavenge for supplies and recruit people for Alexandria. Rick and Daryl also scavenge. Perhaps the biggest transformation is Carol, who goes from meek, abused housewife to fully-capable heroine (who also cooks). Such skills exhibit versatility and a higher probability of survival in the post-apocalypse. This refinement to specific roles is even reflected in the zombies. Perceived differently in a world without zombie lore, the main group calls them 'walkers,' whilst others call them 'biters,' 'roamers,' 'rotters,' 'the damned,' etc. Such names show how they are viewed

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with disdain and as constant reminders of what was lost or used to be. Just as the "heroes" do, then, "enemies" also have specific roles to play.

This breakdown into purely utilitarian roles is also reflected within the landscape itself as it changes. The apocalypse creates a wasteland: unused land becomes overgrown fields. Houses, previous symbols of wealth and success, become dispensable shelters and also liabilities when 'infested' by former owners. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was once a beacon of hope, a cure, security, sanitation and an escape from the harsh realities of the new world ('Wildfire' and 'TS-19,' 2010). Yet this is where survivors find out there is no cure; they are all infected. Though few survivors have medical or scientific backgrounds to attempt a cure, this bit of classified information is helpful: they realise their goal is to simply survive. Once roles can be established, they can mentally prepare for the dangers in the new world and think more clearly about what is worth preserving. This requires a further departure from nostalgia – a reimagining of the self. Once they figure out their new identities, they can decide whether they fit into this strange new world or 'opt out.'

A major component of advancing this 'new world' is establishing effective leaders and new rules. Survival in the post-apocalypse is dependent upon new or adjustable social structures and rules. Though not quite referring to the post-apocalypse, Giddens emphasises, 'a social structure [consisting of] traditions, institutions, moral codes and established ways of doing things also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently' (in Gauntlett 2002: 93). The perception and negotiation of rules and law amongst the survivors arises in this early scene ('Wildfire,' 2010):

Daryl: …[P]eople need to know who the hell's in charge here, what the rules are.

Rick: There are no rules.

Lori: That's the problem. We haven't had one minute to hold onto our old selves. We need time to mourn, and we need to bury our dead. It's what people do.

Viewers can see Daryl expects some structure, perhaps to decide whether he belongs in the group or not, while Rick bravely admits there is none. Yet in Lori's mind, 'what people do,' or rather

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what people used to do, is critically important since past systems are still rooted in her worldview. The other characters recognize that a renegotiation of power and structure must take place, which is one of the main conflicts within the show.

The creators and showrunners also use the post-apocalypse as a testing ground for various types of leadership and living environments. Lavin and Lowe argue: 'Hierarchy construction in [*TWD*] is reflected in the organisation of group leadership' they argue (2015: 118). Angus Nurse adds:

> *The Walking Dead*'s narrative functions as a critique of contemporary law and order policy – in particular, the failure of the reactive policing model to deal with massive lawlessness and the need for alternate law enforcement strategies in the face of rising crime. (2014: 68)

In terms of authoritative resources, leaders of different settlements establish their own forms of government, somewhat establishing rules or a status quo. Leaders who use an eye-for-an-eye mentality rule with fear and are easily pegged as enemies (Negan of the Saviours; Alpha and Beta of the Whisperers), while duplicitous leaders are easily ousted (Gregory of Hilltop).

Regarding structuration, the norms, values or ethics of a society, as well as degrees of power held by individuals within that society, collide in *TWD*. Rick begins as a newcomer who swiftly establishes ethos, cementing leadership by risking his life for others, keeping promises and acting with integrity. His choice to wear his sheriff uniform and hat temporarily ties to the ideals of his former life and a pragmatic appeal to authority. His son, Carl, and later his daughter, Judith, carry a similar ethos when wearing his hat when he no longer needs it. However, Rick may also make executive decisions for selfish gain after consulting with his group, who place blind trust in him. In Alexandria, he convinces the others that former surgeon Pete should be punished for domestic abuse. Rick's ulterior motive is Jessie, Pete's wife, showing Rick has moved away from the old ethics.

In terms of structuration, highly dependent upon the particular context or situation, norms inform us which behaviours or interactions are appropriate. These can be *negotiated* depending on the facilities of other agents. After their arrival, Rick's group decides what is acceptable and unacceptable in their new home. However, the norms in the world of *TWD* are shadows of their pre-outbreak status. *Negotiated norms* in this new world include the appropriateness to help or abandon someone in need, take from the weak to help the strong, resort to cannibalism for

survival, etc. In one scene, Lori, Rick's wife, remarks to Rick, 'Do whatever you gotta do to keep this group safe' ('Sick,' 2012). Lori encourages Rick to enact such negotiated norms. Throughout the series, Rick's struggle is about reconciling his role as a pragmatic post-apocalypse leader with a deeply-engrained 'old world' morality. In essence, he is in the process of negotiating a legitimate compromise between that morality and the state of his new life. In terms of structuration, Rick's struggle is an extended dialogue between legitimation and domination. He must hold on to enough of his 'old world' morality and authority to avoid alienating his partners but must also cast aside points of propriety which may have become liabilities. His group's continued survival is dependent upon his maintaining moral and executive authority.

Perhaps Rick's group's biggest mistake in order to gain allegiance with Hilltop is to take out Hilltop's enemy, the malevolent dictator, Negan, and his Saviors. Some members of Rick's group surprise-attack and kill a good number of Negan's subordinates, never negotiating with Negan. While diplomacy does not appear a viable option, exploring this route would have minimised disrespect to Negan and potentially curbed reprisals. Negan is a formidable opponent, deceptively leading people (and viewers) to believe that he is only taking half of their supplies but realistically owns everything through fear. His people repeat cult-like, 'We are all Negan' yet are quick to abscond when given the chance. When Daryl is captured by the Saviors, he is allowed to choose death, work for points or work with Negan as a lieutenant and 'live like a king' ('The Cell,' 2016). While Negan gives them choices, they are not optimal, particularly for those who crave autonomy.

This leads to another dilemma – letting go of one's individuality. Giddens believes 'power within social systems can thus be treated as involving reproduced relations of autonomy and dependence in social interaction' (1979: 93). This is just one of the differences between the individual and the collective whole. Acting as an individual may be harmful to the group's survival. The same rule applies to zombies. Morgan, Rick's first friend in the post-apocalypse, mentions that one walker is not so harmful; however, collectively, when they get all 'riled up and hungry, watch yo' ass' ('Days Gone Bye,' 2010). Being part of a collective for humans is important until someone becomes infected and hence a liability. Furthermore, *TWD* portrays a more conservative emphasis on the family as the 'central societal institution' (Ambrosius and Valenzano 2016: 71). As a group, they become 'family,' a collective cohesive unit. When

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Deanna of Alexandria gets to know Rick better, she insists, 'They're all your people' ('Start to Finish,' 2015). Michonne, Rick's partner, always tells Rick to fight for them. Negan's people understand the futility of trying to overthrow or kill Negan or fight amongst themselves. These points exemplify that leaders, good or bad, have successfully created collectives but are still motivated by capitalism. Conversely, Daryl is an individual not particularly benefitting from being part of a collective; the collective does, however, require his survival skills. Daryl is effective on his own but works for the betterment of the group. Initially, Glenn prefers scavenging by himself as he only has himself to worry about; going with a group complicates things. When he does decide to take someone with him, he thinks critically about who should go with him, compared to Lori who endangers others with her rash actions. Selfishness or fear may also be detrimental to others' survival, hence the importance of collectivism over individualism.

Another way individuality prevents progress is that even the most pragmatic characters struggle to retain their humanity due to the old-world moral code. Some have qualms about killing. Morgan may have the biggest problem with nostalgia, suffering from PTSD after losing his wife and son. For a while, his mental state led to violence and self-preservation; but a brief meeting with Eastman, who teaches him non-violence through aikido, instils in him the idea that life is precious ('Here's Not Here,' 2015). He comes to a happy medium when Jesus of Hilltop suggests using the sharp end of his staff for 'walkers' and the blunt end for people ('Wrath,' 2018). Another example of the old moral code arises when Rick's son, Carl, rescues Siddiq, a Muslim and former medical student who gave up the Hippocratic oath since his mother believed that killing 'walkers' frees their souls. Siddiq's words, 'My mercy prevails over my wrath,' ('Mercy,' 2017) become a mantra for Rick ('Wrath,' 2018). Carl sacrifices his own life for Siddiq's, a stranger's ('Honor,' 2018), bringing an end to Rick's selfishness as a leader and showing mercy towards Negan. However, Rick's decision – though they had trusted him before – creates a rift among friends, who disperse into the three main settlements. Later, the groups form their own coalition, creating and signing a Multi-Community Charter of Rights and Freedoms, their ersatz constitution ('The Calm Before,' 2019) showing they would like to keep some old moral codes such as diplomacy. While nostalgia via these old moral codes can be helpful, holding onto the rules and habits of 'old' society – such as loving thy neighbour and assisting the less fortunate – is not always a viable option. Sometimes, it is necessary to depose or kill the ill-behaved for the greater good when there is no more justice system.

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Self-preservation is paramount, particularly in some groups who try to help others but are negatively reciprocated. Terminus in Seasons 4 and 5 begins as a sanctuary for good people who were taken advantage of, so they resort to extreme violence for self-preservation. Many characters echo the same sentiments. Eugene from Rick's group states, 'Doing the right thing for one can be trouble for another' ('Time for After,' 2017) and he unwillingly joins Negan and the Saviors. Dwight, a Savior, echoes, 'If you're alive, it's always at another's expense' ('Sing Me a Song,' 2016). Not long after losing Rick, a harrowing experience prevents his partner Michonne from admitting new people into Alexandria ('Scars,' 2019). Thus, each group must make tough decisions regarding whom to allow into their settlements. Rick's group recruits with three deceptively simple questions: How many walkers have you killed? How many humans have you killed? Why? ('30 Days without an Accident,' 2013). The first may indicate physical skill, the second morals and the third decision-making. What complicates these questions is the fact that people quantify their behaviours and usefulness to the new society. What these new rules say about life in the wasteland shows a formalisation or move away from old ways of doing things and moving forward to find more effective ways to lead, take care of survivors and maximise resources.

Through its characters' complex journeys to reallocate authoritative resources, *TWD* poses difficult questions to viewers about the inherent conflict between self and society. Giddens reminds us that when people interact with existing structures, that interaction determines the ones that follow like a chain reaction (1984). Interaction is therefore obligatory for the reproduction of structures; the agents (survivors) interact with the social structure which forms the system. However, systems are not structures in themselves; more likely, these systems *have* structures, and being an organic entity, structuration may even occur without effort. For Giddens, interactivity between the human agents and the rules and resources leads to the production and reproduction of structures. Therefore, production and reproduction of social structures are possible in *TWD* – if sustainability is achieved – once they figure out what is acceptable within the group. As Lee Rozelle points out, 'in this contradictory frontier, Rick and other survivors must reconsider both the physical and psychological boundaries that separate self and territory' (2016: 96). Ehrenfeld and Hoffman add:

> If we live in a culture that says the quality of a person's life is reflected in how well
> we take care of others, the world, and themselves, then we will have an entirely

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different kind of culture that is aligned with sustainability. (2013: 76-7)

TWD creates different kinds of cultures within a spectrum between collectivism and individualism, demonstrating that their success, or total failure, relies on their ultimate sustainability. While they are tying structuration to the sustainability of relationships, there is a simpler concept of sustainability in terms of utilisation of resources.

Sustainability Efforts in *TWD*: Allocative Resources

Survival is dependent upon maximisation or misuse of available resources. Giddens calls these allocative resources, examining the politics of climate change and blaming current economic systems, such as capitalism and consumerism, for ecological damages (in Walker et al. 2013: 432). In the post-apocalyptic wasteland of *TWD*, humans are left to scavenge the remains of a bygone era. Characters initially take what they need through theft or force if not obtainable through barter or trade. Despite the lack of a monetary system, they develop economically by extracting, producing and distributing supplies and services. The availability of resources also depends on location, making it important to discuss urban and rural differences in the post-apocalypse before examining sustainability efforts. Bernard Perron states, 'the survival of Rick Grimes and the various survivors regrouped around him is a matter of space. The characters realize in the first issues that they can't live out in the open or in outdoor environments because the zombies can approach and strike from any direction' (2017: 220). Though he is referring to the *TWD* comics, the same applies to the TV show. Urban areas contain more wasted resources. For example, Atlanta is overpopulated with zombies, making it difficult for survivors to explore stores with food or necessary survival equipment, such as firearms or camping gear. Though undiscovered territory in rural areas can help them live more sustainably, Robert Yeates argues, 'While initially seen as safe havens, these rural spaces sit at the opposite end of the spectrum from the cities but offer illusory tranquillity and are equally unliveable' (2021: 164). Regardless of where survivors reside, they are not only unsafe, but in constant need of resources.

Survivors naturally gravitate toward sustainability, if they have not been living so previously. Rick's group migrates and constantly changes to adapt; Hershel's farm and the Alexandria Safe-Zone have been sustainable pre-outbreak. After he encounters Morgan, Rick meets a large group of survivors outside Atlanta, including his wife, son and best friend. In the first five episodes, they set up camp above an inundated rock quarry, providing an artificial lake

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to wash clothes, bathe, swim and fish. People have begun to figure out things to do to occupy themselves. The women do the laundry and gather edible plants. The men and children gather firewood or hunt for animals, such as fish, frogs, squirrels, rabbits and deer. Furthermore, the air is unpolluted, the water is crystal-clear, and unless an unexpected walker visits, the atmosphere is peaceful – drastically different from the dead-dominated cities. Still in the early stages of the post-apocalypse, life does not feel as traumatic but is more like a camping trip, creating an idyll that cannot be sustained.

In contrast, Hershel's 150-year-old homestead in Season 2 has been sustainable before the apocalypse: Hershel has livestock, petrol-powered generators, wells, gardens and medical supplies. His is the first post-apocalyptic functional community Rick's group encounters. Martin Walter points out that Hershel's farm 'represents a form of edgeland, an isolated, almost utopian space embodying pre-industrial forms of labour away from any urban settlement' (2019: 146). His is old-fashioned sustainability. A more modernised form of sustainability is the Alexandria Safe-Zone, a high-end community with large comfortable houses, solar panels, running water and electricity and well-stocked pantries. Viewers even see a dilapidated billboard with 'Alexandria: The Start of Sustainability' ('Thank You,' 2015) not far from it. Before they get there, Rick and his group reach a low point having been 'out there' in the wilderness for too long. Then they meet Aaron, who despite their distrust, brings them to blissful sanctuary in Alexandria ('The Distance' and 'Remember,' 2015). This new community affords Rick's group the creature comforts they had lost from the previous life and briefly encountered at Hershel's, though it is unbelievable at first.

The limitations of Alexandria's model, however, is a class divide. Other groups, such as Hilltop and the Kingdom, live more minimally. Though Alexandrians have preserved the small-garden concept of suburbia, those at Hilltop and the Kingdom understand the importance of growing crops to sustain populations. Hilltop gains even more of an advantage when they encounter Georgie, a strange woman with female bodyguards, who trades a binder of plans aptly named 'A Key to a Future' with schematics to build windmills, watermills, waterways, grain-refinement processes and so on for a box of vinyl records ('They Key,' 2018). The show again makes clear the inherent conflict between luxury goods and nostalgia, and utilitarianism and survival.

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Another challenge of sustainability that the survivors of *TWD* must overcome is technological regression or cultural lag. Alicia Kozma notes, 'Technology, both in the everyday life of the viewer and of the pre-apocalyptic world of the show, becomes a constitutive force in understanding humanity and its place in the world' (2013: 145). She refers to scholar Diane Marie Keeling: 'As such, the pre-apocalyptic world of the show is one that has entered into a phase of cyclical construction: as humanity constructs technology, technology constructs humanity' (Kozma 2013: 145). Hence, maintaining the technology necessary for survival and preventing it from becoming literal waste becomes paramount in a world where replacing it is difficult. When cars no longer function, people resort to horses, a good means of transport requiring easily-acquired food and water, rather than petrol. Later in the Smithsonian museums, survivors help themselves to ancient seeds and primitive farming equipment for prototypes ('A New Beginning,' 2018). They also begin blacksmithing to not just recreate those prototypes, but weapons, armour and even prosthetics. For self-defence, besides the standard guns, knives and crossbows, the group has reappropriated baseball bats, shovels and other tools. They devise an alarm system with tin cans and rope that sounds when a walker is nearby. In many cases, the traditional uses of these tools have been obviated by the new-world order. Creativity allows them to thrive and improve upon things that did not work in the old world and explore and solve problems presented by the new world, further eschewing nostalgia and enjoying the sustainability that follows.

Zombies themselves inspire ideas toward sustainability, though they deviate from the human life-death cycle. Instead of dying and becoming either a decomposing body (or cremated ashes) that might continue to sustain Nature and flourish, zombies exist to simply consume or terrorise. Yet humans have discovered interesting uses for zombies: as protection, obstacles or traps for other humans. Humans have also discovered ways to permanently kill zombies with guns, knives, swords, spears, sharp sticks, RPGs, tripwires or simply burning their bodies to prevent reanimation. The Saviors tie zombies together as a roadblock, so Rick's people cannot cross the road. With reluctant genius, humans have discovered how much easier it is to pass zombie hordes by wearing their viscera, smelling and moving like zombies early on in Atlanta ('Guts,' 2010); Alexandrians did this when their home was overridden by zombies and had to flee ('No Way Out,' 2016); the Whisperers make use of not just viscera but zombie skins and

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poisonous zombie blood to infect enemies. Such creativity furthers their survival despite the energy, time, and resources to do so.

One of the key functions that technology performs is communication. Alicia Kozma argues that 'technology [serves] as indicators of sociality, communication, isolation, world-making, of the expansion and collapsing of time and space; in other words, technology as the complications, conveniences and nuances of everyday life' (2013: 144). This makes information an important resource, though face-to-face communication is often the only viable means of communication in the new society. There are early radio updates, but without electricity, the group resorts to asynchronous communication. On the highway, Rick's best friend, Shane turns on a car to listen to the radio, indicating there will be no more reports. Some leave signs to benefit others. Viewers see 'No gas' signs at some gas stations ('Days Gone Bye,' 2010) or 'Take what you need. God bless' painted on a window in a pharmacy ('Cherokee Rose,' 2011). Rick leaves a sign for Morgan and Duane to deter them from going to Atlanta and communicates with them via walkie-talkie, sharing the group's progress and knowledge. With the lack of a power grid, these are truly dwindling resources. Much later in Season 10, Eugene revives radios and connects with new groups. This shows that besides word of mouth, radios may be the future of post-apocalyptic communication.

Viewers can see survivors proactively coping with new realities by building new social structures and utilising what is available. By doing so, survivors can escape the nightmare of losing everything they knew and pragmatically build toward their dreams and futures despite constant trial and error. While nostalgia or holding on to old moral codes may lead more to regression rather than progression, some aspects of the past, such as technology, can still be viable. However as mentioned, there exists a cultural lag; survivors require time to fill in the gap of certain missing technologies. Also, the successful establishment of roles, rules, and resources depends upon survivors collaborating, making the unknown future less stressful, focusing on thriving and recovering some semblance of the old world without the frills.

As this analysis shows, *TWD* acts as a mirror for viewers, showing useful lessons to societies experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. For us, roles have changed with working parents staying home and assisting with their children's education. Good leadership is crucial to citizens' well-being. Mandates have been made to wear masks, wash hands and social distance, though not always enforced. Despite lack of leadership, however, citizens have sought creative

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methods to save money and obtain necessities despite scarce resources. In response, new services and technologies have appeared. And of course, we cannot overlook the loss of lives and grief experienced. However, people must collectively work to wipe out this pandemic altogether, given a rare opportunity to re-examine their lives, change or figure out their priorities and decide how to (if at all) help. Poet/activist Sonya Renee Taylor insists,

> We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature. (2020)

The characters in *TWD* have been given that opportunity as well. Those who survive take more chances while others harm themselves by adhering to old-world moral codes that no longer apply. Therefore, flexibility in roles, effective leadership and codes of conduct, as well as maximisation of resources, allows them to leave behind the hubris of the past and look forward.

Conclusion

Referring to *Wall-E* (2008), Christopher Todd Anderson suggests perhaps a post-apocalyptic world is better as it reveals the corrupt defunct old world (2012: 267). Though *TWD* is a far cry from Disney, it fulfils the same function of illuminating current world issues. While there are remnants of the old world of excess, life is simplified. The focus is on survival, security and battling new foes which requires energy, skills and new mentalities. During peace, survivors can rebuild with sustainable methods and can thrive and think toward the future, slightly closer to the old world, but better. The problem in the show, however, is that this sense of security is fragile and often foiled, if not by zombies, but by humans. Hence, there are three key takeaways. First, everyone needs to find a purpose. Second, people need consistent rules to function properly and work collaboratively. Third, because sources are limited, they need to conserve and seek creative solutions. Adaptation is key to survival, which sometimes means letting go of old excess material and emotional baggage that used to plague people, in order to focus on new threats.

The zombie-ridden world of *TWD* not only allows its fictional characters to adapt, but the lens of fiction offers viewers the opportunity to reflect on the threats our world is facing and the solutions sustainability has to offer. Speaking on environmental issues, Giddens makes a highly-

relevant statement: 'No matter how much we are told about the threats, it is hard to face up to them, because they feel somehow unreal – and in the meantime, there is a life to be lived, with all its pleasures, and pressures' (2009: 2). Post-apocalyptic media contains essential components for the structuration process, allowing viewers to imagine possible worlds. Such knowledge could essentially shorten potential cultural lag. Perhaps a sense of impending doom may be necessary to demonstrate the cruciality of structuration and sustainability. The world of *TWD* shares a trait with our own – both fear a decline in resources and endangered environments, yet only one actively pursues a viable course of action. As new episodes arise, viewers eagerly anticipate seeing the fates of the characters and their sustainability efforts. In the end, viewers can sit back and admire *TWD* from afar on screen, but without taking necessary collective action, humanity's own delays in enacting practical structuration and sustainability measures, especially during a pandemic, may do more harm than imaginable.

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