Schools of the Walking Dead
Schools, Societies, Smartness, and Educational Sanctuary

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THERE IS A POINT IN *THE WALKING DEAD*[1] when the characters, desperate and starving, weary from months of wandering and hiding, living almost moment to moment, find a more permanent respite in a seemingly abandoned prison. After the harsh life of "out there," the characters can do something other than scavenge and survive. At least slightly, their torpor fades as they establish routines that exceed zombie hoards and persistent questions of existing in this new world. What, they consider, is to be done with this added time and space? Hoping to sustain, and perhaps begin to build a new life, they take on specific roles. One character creates a small farm in the prison courtyard. Others focus on securing the borders of the prison from outside attacks. Romances and relationships that had little room for expression outside the prison blossom with drama and curiosity. Among these developments, Carol, a supreme badass, uses the remnants of the prison library to start a kind of micro school.

The school aims to occupy the younger members of the group. The group collectively assumes Carol will focus on reading with the children. She is in fact forbidden from teaching otherwise. Educations essential to living outside the prison walls are banished in this new school, leaving the children with an education relatively impractical in this new world. And yet, Carol finds moments of rebellion. When other adults are not there to observe her, she teaches about knives, techniques for killing the undead, and general lessons on how to live in a world of roaming zombies. Arguing for her curriculum a bit later, Carol explains to an older child, hoping he will not tell his father, "I have to keep teaching those kids to survive" (Kang, n.p.). The other curriculum, the one everyone else assumes she will take up, one often familiar in contemporary worlds, appears useless and dated. Those wanting Carol to teach reading seem to cling to a society that will never return. At the same time, Carol's bluntness in teaching about killing reveals a cruelty that feels incompatible with the hopes and aspirations entangled with children and schools. It appears brusquely utilitarian against the joys of reading. The only lesson that seems to interest Carol is how to stay alive, not individually, but collectively. Regardless of the "rightness" of one curriculum or another, a school built in a society dominated by zombies raises old questions of the

role of schools in society, what it means to be "smart," and the function and position of schooling and educatedness in different societal configurations.

Undertaking these questions through a close examination of the world of *The Walking Dead*, this paper explores the relationship of what is taught and learned in schools to the structure of a society. Oft-cited notions of these relations help frame the broad conceptions of school as within, produced by, and producing society. The paper additionally looks at what knowledges and skills would be most useful or reflective of the society the survivors occupy in *The Walking Dead*. Looking at the "traditional" curriculum and pedagogy the survivors hope for, the paper interrogates both the consequences of this educational model in a zombie-filled world and the potential logics behind it. Beyond arguments of antiquated models of schooling, affective attachments lead to a school focused more on reading than zombie killing. Once the paper thoroughly depicts the school the survivors want as outmoded, useless, and lifeless, it shifts to examine the productive possibilities of maintaining a school that sits slightly outside society. Though conceptual in nature, the paper concludes by drawing on a brief ethnographic vignette, one that depicts school as a different kind of place. Ultimately, exploring education in *The Walking Dead* shows that schools can be about functioning within and constructing a society. At the same time, schools can be about sanctuary, playfulness, and experimentation without direct purpose.

Schools and Societies

Looking in many directions, schools and societies are intimately bound together. There is, at first, a persistent idea that schools can and should reflect society and make education directly relevant to life within that society. To offer a notable example, Durkheim (1905/2013) suggested that, in the 19th century, as education moved away from the abstract, a felt need emerged "to educate [children] in the school of reality" (p. 292). Education would no longer just be an academic exercise, but a formal project grounded in the ongoing needs of society. For Durkheim, education "is a function of the social organization of society" (Pickering, 2013, p. 99). Education as a practice and school as an institution thus serve to sustain society. From this conception, education is less about individuals acquiring things (such as skills or knowledge) and more about a social whole. Moreover, Durkheim intimately links education with society's existence. "Education is, then," Durkheim (1922/1956) wrote, "only the means by which society prepares within the children, the essential conditions of its very existence" (p. 71). School's relevance to world beyond the school doors sustains society as a whole.

School not only reflects and sustains society; it also produces it. From perspectives of critical pedagogy or a Deweyan framework, schools can likewise serve aspirational ideas of what societies might yet become. School can be a critical place on which to build better societies. It reflects not what is but what can become. Or, school can be a site to actively maintain the social order. Beyond sustaining society as a whole, it is a place to ensure that everyone in the social order remains in place (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). There are other conceptions as well, but reflecting, maintaining, and producing are the dominant understandings of the relationship between school and society. Throughout, education is a process, and school is a technology used to remind that society must be defended. If children's' "social beings" (to use Durkheim's term) occupy a kind of society that emphasizes scavenging for food and zombie killing, then the conditions of society's existence take on a new shape. It is debatable whether or not the world of *The Walking Dead* can be deemed "society."[2] The point, though, is that Durkheim and others set

the stage to inextricably link the educational activities children encounter with the world the occupy.

Within societies, schools also frequently have a difficult time changing.[3] According to Tyack and Cuban (2009), a persistent structuring—a grammar of schooling—governs and influences the changes possible for schools and school systems. It is not that schools cannot change; historical, cultural, and political factors converge and exert influence so that only incremental changes are possible. These changes happen slowly and are not necessarily based on society's needs. They are, instead, based on common sense assumptions of what has been entrenched as ideal knowledge, ingrained ideas about how real schools should look, and an understanding of "simply the way schools worked" (Tyack & Cuban, 2009, p. 107). Knowledge, skills, pedagogy, curriculum, classrooms, etc. may all change as society changes, but they change within a confining framework that may be out of step with changing societies. What Tyack and Cuban show is not a contestation of something like Durkheim's ideas but a depiction of the embedded nature of schooling, both within societies and schools' own material history.

This structuring conjures old and common arguments about schools' seeming out-of-touch-ness, where the grammar maintains a factory model of schooling that does not reflect the current or future needs of society. Even though society may have emerging needs for different skills or knowledge, both the commonsense notion of what "real" school looks like ("this is how we did it when I was in school…") and the material constraints of school buildings, classrooms, desks, and so on reinforce the grammar of schooling. The seeming disjuncture between listening to Carol do a read aloud and educating kids about zombie killing methods is not some unique phenomenon born of an apocalypse. Referring to the discussion of schools being outdated, Mehta (2013) finds that they take shape around a bureaucratic form. They emphasize a factory-like model, not only for students but a general "logic of managerial control" (p. 9). Consequently, students are prepared for an industrial society that no longer exists. As societies enter the Information Age, the thinking goes, schools often still prepare children using the logic of the Industrial Revolution. As dramatic shifts occur, there are dire consequences such as a society having an unprepared workforce (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Even as some aspects of society change, the grammar of schooling keeps these structures intact. Extending this argument, Bellanca (2012) points out that, by the 21st century, "U.S. schools had become as obsolete as Henry Ford's 19th century assembly line. Unlike manufacturers who had modernized their production with the introduction of new technologies," schools now "appeared frozen in time with outdated curricula, worn-out instruction, and inadequate tools for assessing the quality of what teachers produced" (p. 1). From this perspective, schools maintain society but also serve to prevent it from solving its problems. These discussions also say little about the ways in which schools can stay the same as a way of maintaining racial, linguistic, class, and gender hierarchies within the social order.[4]

Of course, the stuff of the grammar of schooling—classrooms, Carnegie Units, and even policy elites like Michael Bloomberg—has been destroyed, with policy elites likely turned into roaming zombies. Most factors confining a school have disappeared. Individual feelings of racism or sexism remain in this new fictional world, but racist and patriarchal structures are gone. One might think the survivors are finally free to make of school anything they want. A school of desire and dreams and new futures. The relationship between schools and society has here been knocked from its orbit. Free to make school within a potential new world, why then does the school of *The Walking Dead* take the form that it does? At least, why are the old ways not abandoned? Why is school so familiar and so out of touch with the needs and rhythms of the world in which these children live? Are there other forces keeping the grammar intact?

Rebuilding Ashes

This schooling moment in *The Walking Dead* extends Tyack and Cuban's (2009) notions of the grammar of school's hegemony, offering a reason beyond "laws, institutional customs, and cultural beliefs" used to explain why the grammar of schooling persists (p. 107). The request from other characters to have Carol sit in the library and read books with the kids evokes some semblance of schooling before the zombie apocalypse. From a first reading, it appears as though the grammar is lodged in memories as "cultural beliefs" play out in the prison. Though they find books in the library, the majority of schooling's materials are no more. What seems to remain is a culturally produced memory of what schools should look like and what they should do. The characters are only a year or two removed from society's clutches. There is still likely a very real image of what counts as desirable knowledge and how schools should look. Common sense of the way things were clings to the survivors' brains.

Yet, I argue that there is something else at work here. Such understandings of "real school" certainly entangle with reveries of the characters' previous lives. Beyond their memories of school structures, the adults and some of the students carry affective attachments to school as part of the safety and stability of the old world. In an earlier moment, the group's leader, Rick, shouts at the survivors,

> Do you think you're ever going to watch television again? … Buy groceries? *Drop your kids off at school*?! … It will never happen!! You can come to grips with the sad fact—or you can sit around wishing for it to happen! (Kirkman, 2005a, n.p., emphasis added)

And yet, even if it was a site of dated learning or racial segregation, the feeling of school evokes what came before. Before family members were eaten alive, before hunger crawled into every muscle, and before society's destruction came school as a site of routine and certainty. The characters regularly refer to the prison in this way, with the school emerging as the thing they make within these borders. Where fear permeates every crevice of this world, safety and comfort circulate through the school in *The Walking Dead*. Here, there is a feeling that maybe kids can relax and read, something Carl and the other children may have done only a short time before. The school allows for a kind of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), a hope that school will enable a return to an impenetrable past. In an inversion of Ralph Chaplin's (1915) revolutionary lyrics, the characters aim to "bring to birth an old world from the ashes of the new." In this way, the grammar persists not only from material conditions but also from affective attachments.

I return to and complexify the role of safety and care in schools below, but for now these affective attachments also explain why the characters might build up school the way it used to be, even when seemingly freed to do otherwise, even when doing so creates danger or, to use Berlant's (2011) phrasing, an obstacle to their own flourishing. Moreover, it explains why they rebuild old structures of smartness even when society demands something else. These affects disrupt the possibility of a future yet to come in favor of rebuilding a school that values the same kind of intelligence and takes on the same structures that reflect and have produced so many exclusions and inequities. After all, was school ever safe? If so, for whom, where, and when?

At the same time, affect is not merely limiting, keeping alive a dead grammar. Berlant (2012) suggests that there are possibilities born of such massive shifts, where "the situation can become the kind of event whose enigmatic shape repels being governed by the foreclosure of what has happened before" (p. 72). For all the devastation, there is also possibility here. Affect can

sustain the grammar of school, but it is also a wily thing. In building a school aiming for a return to the past, the characters open routes for a new sensation, one likely absent from their survivalist existence before the prison—hope. Anderson (2006) reminds that "the taking place of hope enacts the future as open to difference, but also reminds us that the here and now is 'uncentered, dispersed, plural, and partial' (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p. 259)" (p. 734). Lori, Rick's wife says, "I know it seems weird now, but we don't have to follow the old rules, we can make new ones" (Kirkman, 2005b, n.p.). Even as school appears in the same old way, there is possibility here for both the school and the survivors to become something else.

Schools as the Walking Dead

Before exploring how schooling might look otherwise, I now articulate potential outcomes of this school's structure. Rather than oversimplify the situation, I read the scenes through Carol's perspective, focusing on what school becomes when it carries little relevance to the society in which it exists. That is, I consider the new world to which Lori refers through the "practical" and "realist" logics undergirding the old world. In her first teaching scene, Carol waits until the other adult in the library leaves. As soon as he does, she stops mid-sentence. A girl knowingly asks if she should stand guard and Carol nods. Carol then takes out a tray of knives and tells the children that today they will learn about knives, "how to use them, how to be safe with them, and how they could save your life." The oldest boy in the room shifts in his seat and asks "ma'am, may I be dismissed?" Carol refuses, saying "sometimes you'll have to fight through it … what if you're out there … you're just going to give up because you're feeling bad?" (Gimple, n.p.). She suggests that, if he does not learn these skills, he is doomed in the inevitable moments of terror and danger he will encounter beyond the prison walls. In this scene, the external architecture and rhythms of schooling persist. Children gather in a circle and sit at the feet of a knowledgeable person. They spend allotted time learning about a thing. Pedagogy is not at issue for Carol. Rather, it is a curricular question of what is in and what is out. Which knowledge counts here? How might it be used within/against the world? What are the consequences of learning that is untethered from the world in which they live?

This curriculum and pedagogy, when constructed and deployed in a society filled with vicious gangs, zombies, and extremely limited resources, leaves the children unprepared for what society demands. Their knowledge and skills are wildly out of touch with their everyday lives. Without a younger generation prepared to fortify barriers, scavenge for food, and so on, this school is not executing its duty to society (both present and future). With only limited time for schooling, in schools of the walking dead, reading becomes a treacherous practice.

Of course, even from this perspective, reading may prove useful in moments. Reading signs allows survivors to find or avoid other groups. Words scrawled on walls warn of zombies lurking inside buildings. Reading creates the possibility of silence in precarious moments and allows those who do not hear to communicate in a different way. All of these possibilities reveal utilitarian purposes for reading. Yet, the survivors routinely suggest more pressing needs for their world. And, rather than learning to scavenge like Glen or kill with Rick's tenacity, the children are held to the library. They find themselves freed from the existential pressures the other characters face but also unprepared for threats that will, inevitably, arrive. Conjuring a common framing, reading can be every bit as oppressive as it can be liberating.

In choosing reading, particularly in its competitive position against teaching something else during that time, the survivors choose to value the same old knowledge and keep intact a stable understanding of one kind of smartness. They prop up an archaic order of things at the expense of the present society. In the world of *The Walking Dead*, reading is a skill, and literature in general is a body of knowledge out of touch with the world. From Carol's perspective, beneath the veneer of learning and participating in a classroom community, the school's core, where education reflects or propels society, rots away. Education sits as a hollow shell, serving no real discernable purpose for the children. It exists and operates, but it is not alive. The school the survivors make is, functionally speaking, a zombie school.

Schools in *The Walking Dead*

If Carol found herself with complete autonomy as a teacher, what might her school look like? Based on her scenes in the library, this school's makings and logics would not become some kind of Freirean culture circle but a school similar to the majority of 21st century U.S. schools. Carol accepts the general structure of schooling, including maintaining the role of the teacher, dividing the day into discrete subjects, and much else. The school that the survivors could build (and the hope of schools across the U.S. today) would aim to develop an education most useful out in the world. In the postapocalyptic world, therefore, the main shift would be on the content, creating classes that focus on knowledge and skills valuable in this new world. Such a school would reveal much about the utilitarian relationship between schools and societies. Importantly, this kind of school illustrates the contingency of how smartness is made and understood in different worlds. The things valued in school, particularly smartness, are, thus, revealed not as universal entities but as deeply entangled with time and place.[5] At the same time, such a school keeps intact a stable view of smartness. It may show how perceptions of smartness stick to times and places, but this is simply an inversion. Standardized test scores are less relevant than Rick's skill with a knife, Andrea's accuracy with a gun, or Glenn's sneaking in and out of places undetected. Yet, a clear, hierarchical understanding of what it means to be a smart person in the world remains.

Additionally, this kind of school offers a most dramatic example of a utilitarian role for schools. This kind of school reveals itself as nothing other than a reflection of the world the survivors occupy. It is a school built not on foundations of a control or disciplinary society (to borrow from Deleuze or Foucault). It is not a school striving toward a liberatory society (in the vein of critical pedagogy). The school in *The Walking Dead* is a school for a survival society. Speculating the possibility of Carol's school, I now offer an incomplete sketch of class subjects, following recognizable schooling elements of sample learning objectives, assessments, classroom materials, and identifiable skills and knowledge.

Stealth Killing Class

Sample learning objective: Students will be able to apply background knowledge of moving silently to effectively kill zombies using given tools and without attracting attention.
Sample learning activities: Lecture on how to use knives, classroom activity of hide and seek with noisy objects scattered throughout the library, small group scavenger hunt of finding different ways to cloak yourself from zombies (e.g., covering yourself in zombie guts)

Sample classroom materials: Knives, hammers, wrenches, sneakers
Sample assessment: Experiential learning assessment with students tasked with killing a given number of zombies beyond the prison walls without attracting attention. Killing technique, level of noise, and making it out safe are all elements that will be assessed.

Roaming and Navigation Class

Sample learning objective: Students will be able to recognize geographic landmarks, patterns of zombie movement, and other factors to safely navigate from a food run to the prison.
Sample learning activities: Guest lectures on how to blend in with zombies without attracting attention, stations or museum walk studying different geographical features, memorizing activity of stating directions and students repeating those directions ("to get to the gas station with the canned goods, walk out of the prison until you see a barn. At the barn, go right. Walk until you see the dirt road. Avoid the zombie hoard by sneaking through the grass")
Sample classroom materials: Maps, flashlights, backpacks, weapons
Sample assessment: A scenario-based oral examination. Students will be given specific situations and have to explain how they would find their way through the world. For instance: "You're on a food run and suddenly see a group of zombies. It's raining, which means zombie guts will wash off and you'll be detectable. You don't have a knife. What do you do and why?"

Bricolage Class

Sample learning objective: Working in groups of 2-3, students will be able to create a perimeter defense using materials found in the library.
Sample learning activities: Labs exploring how different objectives work together, scientific demonstrations on how to combine materials to make explosives, whole group brainstorm on as many different uses for an object as they can find (following Robinson's (2010) challenge for divergent thinking by finding different uses for a paper clip)
Sample classroom materials: All kinds of objectives found in the prison and beyond the prison walls, including bottles, books, tubes, gas canisters, rope
Sample assessment: Students are given a box or bag of materials and told to combine those available materials into something that will allow them to survive 5-7 different scenarios (e.g., create something that silences guns, something that allows you to climb a tree to safety, something that protects your body from bites)

"Laffing" In Schools of The Walking Dead

These classes act as examples within an exercise about a synonymous relationship between school and society, but they proceed from the perspective of those designing the school. One should not assume, however, that students are simply passive in school. Would students accept this strict utilitarian approach? Has a curriculum ever moved from thought to planning to teaching to learning completely intact? In *Learning to Labor*, for instance, Willis (1981) shows subversive responses to schooling structures, a counterspace, where students (lads) can have a "laff." It is

precisely subversion, changing the game, that resists being the walking dead. Having a laff "is also used in many other contexts: to defeat boredom and fear, to overcome hardship and problems—as a way out of almost anything. In many respects the 'laff' is the privileged instrument of the informal" (p. 29). Students may welcome a utilitarian curriculum that helps them survive. It might prove useful in working toward establishing a society within the prison walls. But, the children may also want to do more than just survive. They may want to play and fool around and not listen to a thing Carol has to say. Rather than suggest how Carol can reinforce her curriculum, once again "to teach these kids to survive," it is here that I want to turn against the survivors' affective urges and Carol's utilitarian curriculum to suggest that school can be something else entirely.

Beyond Progress and Survival

From the descriptions above, it may appear that school and society are inextricably entangled. It is also possible for school to stand intentionally and productively outside of society. In their book, *In Defence of the School*, Masschelein and Simons (2013) argue that school can be reinvented to "provide 'free time' and to gather young people around a common thing" (p. 10). These common things serve to present school as open, undetermined in space and time. School here sits both spatially and intellectually outside of society. That is not to say that such a school would be divorced from the world beyond its walls but that schools can become laboratories or recreational spaces produced within the world to operate with some distance from the everyday rhythms and demands of the world.

Masschelein and Simons ground their argument in the historical example of *scholè*, roughly translating to "free time," where wealthy men in Greek city-states studied and practiced in their leisure time. The authors reframe the use of this free time, seeing it as a "democratization, equalization and the generating of an egalitarian time where anyone, without any particular qualification, can both join and make the school" (p. 28). Sitting askew from society, school becomes not a mechanism to strive toward equality; it can become a site for the practice of equality in itself. That can still mean that people develop and present different skills in different areas. In a school of this kind in *The Walking Dead*, though, such skills would not place some survivors above others. Rather than replacing one type of smartness with another and keeping the same hierarchical structure, in such a school everyone would study together, teach each other, and share in the collective work of education.

Such theories further suggest that school does not have to be exclusively a site of preparation for the young to participate in society. School need not be an institution to effectively maintain society. It need not even be a place to produce different future societies. For them, the school can be a place that is specifically *unproductive*. They do not use unproductive in terms of suggesting time off or that the survivors can take a quick break to recuperate. Such conceptions serve the need to specifically reproduce basic aspects of a society (say, capitalist production or surviving in a zombie world sustained through bouts of rest). Instead, unproductivity here suggests that outcomes are not prefigured assumptions. The unproductiveness of the school space offers children an opportunity be removed from the unequal order of things (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 29) and take up education work without predetermined ends. Where society cuts up groups and individuals, placing them into hierarchical systems, the school can take children from this structure. They suggest that the school actually exists in a kind of suspension, a "temporary interruption of both time and place" (p. 36) where "the requirements, tasks, and roles that govern

specific places and spaces such as the family, the workplace, the sports club, the pub and the hospital no longer apply" (p. 33). Masschelein and Simons offer the example of a car engine. Outside of the school, an engine is something to properly fix. It must function (especially if it is used to escape zombies). Within the school, however, the engine becomes something to play with and explore. The engine appears closer to a piece in a museum than an auto shop. Rather than a tool, it becomes an object of study and play. Again, the school is here not within society but standing slightly outside, in another dimension. It becomes unproductive and inoperable in its demand for outcomes, but it does produce something, an unknown and indeterminate something else.

If school is a place of suspension, Masschelein and Simons suggest that "school gives people a chance (temporarily, for a short while) … to become a student just like everyone else" (p. 32). At a pivotal moment in the prison, Rick turns to the survivors, exasperated, and tells them, "*We are the walking dead*" (Kirkman, 2005a, n.p.). When the survivors have been so thoroughly defined by the exhaustion of surviving, when their appearances, movements, and minds have become deeply zombified, the school allows them to become something else, to be other people. They are not survivors or the walking dead—but students—not defined by utilitarian skills or named through relentless trauma but understood as an emergent something else. They must still heed Carol's plea to learn how to survive. Yet, that is not all that education must mean for the students. In this way, schools can be places that give life. Without outcomes, suspended from society, school allows for an imagination that creeps toward the unknown.

Shifting from this largely conceptual paper, I offer an ethnographic vignette as another possibility for school coming untethered from society. In this project, I studied with recently immigrated youth in their everyday lives (Corson, 2020). Seeing certain knowledges made precarious in school and learning about ways of being that did not fit into the grammar of schooling, the project largely discards school in favor of other kinds of education. Yet, in a conversation with one participant, Matias (a pseudonym) explains that school has come to be a place where he feels safe, removed from the violence and danger of everyday life. The project pushes against labels like "at-risk" and framings of places like participants' neighborhoods as dangerous or devoid of educational possibility. Matias regularly undertakes rigorous and productive educational practices in many places in his everyday life. At the same time, he describes situations of physical and structural danger. Racist subway riders, ICE agents, or friends he wants to avoid creep into everyday life. With these risks, the school can become a unique place, one of refuge. Within the school, Matias is able to be and to think otherwise. There are moments where school tries to define him through deficits of "risk" or "language learner," but he also finds moments to process, to think, and to become something else. When school stands slightly outside of society, just as it does in the survivors' prison, school can become a place of sanctuary. The demands and dangers of the outside world are less present. Rules, categories, and hierarchies recede in favor of collective play. Actions and ideas that would have dire consequences elsewhere transform into generative routes of study.

Returning to the affects circulating through schools, Fine (2018) asks for a reading of possibility, "the 'warm embrace' of schools designed as sanctuaries" (p. 155). Held against the terror deployed against immigrant communities, the school as sanctuary welcomes feelings of hope. Likewise, in a school within the world of *The Walking Dead*, hope might not generate an affective attachment to the old world but a hope for building something else—a school that could be a separate space to think otherwise and also build the skills needed to survive. These ideas veer from school acting as a site of progress on which to build a society toward something more radical.

The possibility of school is something unknown and unknowable, something emerging from the separate time and space to think and be otherwise.

There is also an unresolved tension here. Schools as sanctuaries of free time offer respite from dangerous and violent worlds. Whether *The Walking Dead's* threats from other survivors and zombies or the everyday realities of structural violence and persistent threats of school shootings, society regularly comes to crash down the school doors. Like the prison fences that the survivors construct and bolster, it may seem like schools as sanctuary spaces require strong borders and more direct protection from the outside world. Yet, I argue that school can be both a sanctuary space and a place that works to abolish borders. Schools should not fortify their walls like a prison, cast out those seen as not belonging. School, in its truest sense, can become a place of care—a place to welcome anyone who shows up at its doors. Safety and sanctuary come not from stronger borders but from the world outside—a community, a people—collectively building this place apart.

Conclusion: What Schools Might Become

In moving toward Fine's (2018) or Masschelein and Simon's (2013) possibility for school, linkages between school and society cannot be forgotten. Possibilities emerge within and through school, but even as a place of refuge, schools might have porous borders. The world of "out there" can be explored, processed, and interrogated in schools. In the world of "out there," people can also think and be otherwise. Survivors might still fabulate new worlds in the middle of killing zombies. School can be special—a place of free time and becoming—but it need not be unique, closed off, or exclusive. Thinking and being otherwise do not need to stand in conflict with the practical lessons that help produce and sustain society. The school can be a site of preparation, reflecting and grounded in society's demands. It can also be outdated and purposeless, not in terms of irrelevance to students' lives but in terms of standing askew to societal structures and demands. Doing so allows for a playfulness and mystery to creep into educational work.

Exploring how school appears in *The Walking Dead* also allows for a challenge to commonly deployed notions of smartness. Rather than universally defined intelligence (e.g., IQ tests), a school in *The Walking Dead* reveals smartness as contextual. The suspended nature of school, meanwhile, challenges any hierarchy of intelligence, revealing it as relational and emergent. It is not only that smartness depends on time and place, but that perhaps metrics like smartness or academic success should not be the dominant frameworks in schools. When school is a refuge, this free time welcomes something like failure (not in the Silicon Valley sense but in the sense in which Halberstam [2011] uses it) and risk.

A close reading of how school is presented in the comic and show opens routes of inquiry into schools all around, seeing zombie schools in present worlds, exploring the uses and risks of societally-bound utilitarian educations, and the possibilities of making schools as separate things. Through making a school that is at once practical and impractical, both within and outside the world, a new understanding of school emerges. Beyond reflecting, maintaining, or producing societies, the purpose is that we do not know the purpose of education. Schools might serve countless other purposes, many of them unknowable or yet to emerge. In that way, following Spinoza and Deleuze (Deleuze, 1990), we do not yet know what school will become.

Notes

1. Throughout the paper, I refer to both the comic and television show. Though the two share much in theme and plot, I cite the individual authors, R. Kirkman for the comic and S. M. Gimple and A. Kang for the show, when making specific references.
2. Given this tension, I use "society" and "world" somewhat interchangeably throughout.
3. Historical examples both reinforce the relationship between schools and society and show how changes in the broader social structure allow for more radical changes in the making and doing of schooling (e.g., Carnoy's [2007] examination of Cuba's post-revolution education system).
4. For a complex interrogation of race and gender in *The Walking Dead*, see Erwin and Keetley (2018).
5. This rendering relates to but is a more radical examination of the contingency of smartness than something like the common focus on 21st century skills (e.g., Gardner, 2008).

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