

THE REVOLT OF THE LIVING DEAD: A SOCIO-POLITICAL CHRONICLE

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Abstract: *Our article explores how the horror genre, and more specifically the zombie subgenre, reflects and comments on broader cultural anxieties. Horror films featuring zombies serve as barometers of cultural anxieties, examining and undermining the norms and policies of contemporary capitalism by using monsters as metaphors for economic and social crisis. Horror films featuring zombies function as discursive artifacts and spaces of ideological conflict that contribute to both reinforcing and disseminating cultural norms, but also to challenging them. The analysis provides sufficient arguments to consider the genre as either fundamentally conservative, acting to support the status quo by demonizing and destroying the unknown, or radical and transformative, challenging norms while exposing societal fears.*

Horror films could be considered a reactionary genre because they prefer to look elsewhere for reasons to explain the difficulties society is going through, ignoring the real sources of the problems and blaming the disintegration of society on nebulous causes. They can also be considered the secretion of a reactionary ideology because they envision the solution to the fragility and insecurity of the world we live in by giving up some freedoms within a closed, quasi-totalitarian society.

As privileged expressions of popular culture, these dark stories simultaneously mediate the thesis and antithesis, being symbolic spaces in which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses confront each other. These films can be read either as carriers of reactionary messages, because they nostalgically evoke, under the guise of destruction, fundamental values of society, or as expressions of the will to restructure society.

Keywords: *horror films, zombies, crisis, social criticism, ideological analysis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As a territory of emotion and entertainment, the horror genre exploits the complications and terror that arise when boundaries are blurred and dismantled – whether they are physical, aesthetic, or rational in nature (Harrington, 2018). Inherently, horror is a genre of

excess. Its reputation as a ‘discredited’ and low-budget genre allows horror to take extreme liberties and risks and to question the status quo, sparking revolutionary potential (Kawin, 2012).

In the heterogeneous landscape of horror films, the zombie subgenre stands out by transforming the threat from a solitary entity into an overwhelming, contagious and massified force, serving as a conscious vehicle for radical economic and social criticism of capitalism and societal disintegration. The figure of the zombie is inseparable from the history of colonial slavery, representing a cultural projection of the horrors of dehumanisation and enslavement. The relationship between zombies and colonial slavery is direct and profound, shaped by the systematic violence of the French plantations in Saint-Domingue (Haiti). Zombies are creatures originating in Haitian folklore, a country that gained its independence following a revolt of the black and mulatto population against the small white elite. In voodoo, a religion born from the crossbreeding of an African type of black magic with Catholicism, slavery was explained by the action of a sorcerer who awakens the dead to a second life, dedicated exclusively to hard labour on the sugar cane plantations. “Zombie”, a Creole word later borrowed by the English language, began to signify, in the land of slavery, the resurrected dead, enslaved to the will of their master. Another page in the history of colonial subjugation was written in 1915, when, after a century of freedom, the island was occupied by the Americans. This episode reinforced the association of the figure of the zombie with slavery, interpreted as a form of social mortification.

Consequently, the zombie is a product derived from the repressed history of slavery, of the practices of enslaved peoples, portraying in an excessive formula the idea of forced docility and dehumanised labour. Although Western popular culture has borrowed the figure of the zombie from Haitian folklore, transforming it into a metaphor for consumerism or recession, the meaning of the zombie cannot completely detach itself from its original racial meanings, which evoke a history of violence, genocide, and slavery (Luckhurst, 2015).

Along these lines, a rich inventory of meanings has developed, designating the person who has lost their identity or the person manipulated for production or political purposes. The apathetic person, the drugged individual, or the lethargic person is also a zombie. First an object of ethnographic study, then a character in books and films, the zombie quickly became embedded in the Western popular imagination. The transformation of the zombie from an exotic folkloric creature into a ubiquitous metaphor is an illustration of how popular culture absorbs and adapts social and geopolitical anxieties.

The names of American novelists W. B. Seabrook and H. P. Lovecraft and the year 1930 are linked to the earliest works of zombie fiction. In 1932, Victor Halperin directed *White Zombie*, a horror film starring Bela Lugosi. This film, which can be considered the first zombie film, capitalises on the cultural legacy of Seabrook’s book, imagining a brainless and violent character under the control of a mad scientist. The 1936 film *Things to Come*, based on the novel by H.G. Wells, goes a step further, anticipating more recent zombie productions based on the apocalyptic scenario of an uncontrollable plague.

The established image of these creatures is almost entirely due to George A. Romero’s series of living dead, which populate the imagination of horror film consumers with the most memorable and nightmarish representations. The first in this series, the 1968 *Night of the Living Dead*, considered an unrivalled masterpiece, quickly became a cult film that defined the conventions of the genre, crystallising the formula for the zombie apocalypse and definitively breaking the link with Haitian folklore (Kawin, 2012: 118). It is followed by *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), where, as a result of a process of multiplication until they dissolve into an

anonymous mass or horde, zombies become “the archetypal monster of capitalism,” associated with consumerist alienation, exploitation, and recession (Luckhurst, 2015: 108).

The renewed challenges to the ontological sense of security of contemporary film enthusiasts coincide with a powerful resurgence of this genre through the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), or through the British films *28 Days Later* (2002), *28 Weeks Later* (2007) and, more recently, *28 Years Later* (2025). To the rich filmography on this theme, we can add films such as *Rec* (2007), *The Plague* (2006), the television series *Dead Set* (2008), *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022), and *The Last of Us* (2024-2025). The above films are worth mentioning either because they offer a fresh take on the theme or because they innovate in terms of cinematic discourse.

2. ZOMBIE HORROR FILMS, FANTASIES OF CRISIS

The typical scenario of apocalyptic zombie fiction is schematic and predictable. A mysterious and highly virulent disease attacks human societies *en masse* in a very short period of time. Creatures that were once decent citizens, neighbours, family members, roam the city in hordes, looking for victims. The victims of the zombies become zombies themselves. The ease with which the disease spreads within human communities overwhelms the authorities, and civil society quickly collapses. Quarantine and a state of emergency are declared in vain, and law enforcement agencies are instructed to eliminate any threat by any means necessary. Against the apocalyptic backdrop of a world fallen into pre-industrial savagery, the story usually follows the desperate attempts of survivors to resist.

Beyond the excessive spectacle of terror, these fictions circulate a set of latent meanings with social validity. Our article explores how the horror genre, specifically the zombie subgenre, reflects and comments on broader cultural anxieties. Zombie horror films serve as a barometer of cultural anxieties, examining and undermining the norms and policies of contemporary capitalism by using monsters as metaphors for economic and social crises.

George Romero kindly specifies that the zombies he creates remain creatures with passions and needs like ours, adding that in his zombie films, “the dead brought back to life represent a kind of revolution, a radical reversal of the world, which many of his human characters fail to understand, preferring to label the living dead as Enemies, when in fact they are us. I use blood in all its gruesome glory to make the audience understand that my films are more of a socio-political chronicle of the times than silly adventures with a horror twist” (Eco, 2007). Romero’s great merit is that he reinvents this character, using it as a vehicle through which he consciously expresses a subtle critique of the real ills of consumerist society: the obesity of his contemporaries’ hedonism, corporate greed, labour exploitation, bioengineering, and governmental stupidity. Zombies can be interpreted as a metaphorical expression of social or political demands, consumerism, the desire for immortality, and scientific irresponsibility.

Apocalyptic stories involving zombies have close ties to a turbulent social landscape. The third decade of the last century, which marks the birth of the genre, was marked by the emergence of two forms of totalitarianism that directly threatened the free world. Towards the end of the 1960s, the United States faced the horrors and disappointments of the Vietnam War and widespread street protests generated by the escalating human costs of this conflict. Zombie films draw on this nihilistic attitude towards death and the destruction caused by war. The gratuitous violence of these films refers to the absurdity of the Vietnam War. The same period was marked by the struggle of black Americans for racial desegregation and other basic civil rights, and by marches in favour of the right to vote. It is

no coincidence that most of these films appeared amid a wave of paranoia fuelled by the possibility that the Cold War could degenerate into a nuclear holocaust. The 1990s saw the collapse of the Communist bloc and the riots of young black people in Los Angeles. Triggered by the unjust verdict of a predominantly white jury in a case of violence by white police officers against a black repeat offender, the protests degenerated into street violence. Television stations around the world broadcast images of several neighbourhoods engulfed in flames, looting, and innocent people – especially white people – being brutally beaten. Millennial hysteria, compounded by new global crises and challenges (Islamic terrorism, accelerated globalisation), are what fuel the subtext of the remakes of the 2000s.

The cultural memory of the Black Death pandemics of the Middle Ages, when people fell prey more easily to plagues, famine, or wars, meets contemporary fears of infection with the new lethal viruses of the end and beginning of the millennium in apocalyptic zombie horror films: AIDS, SARS, EBOLA, COVID 19, etc. These dark fantasies recycle the medieval theme of the triumph and carnival of death, which at the time served to remind everyone of the imminence and inevitability of death, and at the same time to exorcise the terror it caused. Confronting the public with these nightmarish creations of the human mind is a modern way of reminding us that we are transient.

Horror films are fictions of crisis. All these terrifying stories respond to the obsessions of the era. Horror films are a symbolic expression of universal fears of death, violence, the unknown, as well as the deep anxieties and hostilities of society. In their subtext, we can read people's confusion and fear of economic crisis, social change, epidemics, AIDS, political instability, the threat of terrorism or nuclear annihilation (Kellner, 2001: 154). It is natural that periods of high conflict intensity, ravaged by economic and political crises or marked by technological changes, should be the starting point for fiction that reflects social phobias in a sublimated manner.

One hypothesis is that these fictions have a cathartic function, allowing people to therapize their anxiety about no longer being in control of their daily lives by projecting it into the controlled environment of cinematic fiction:

“Through brutal and sometimes pathetic means, horror films channel the audience's anxieties and confusion in order to ultimately domesticate them by comparing them to a reality that, although difficult, is nowhere near as nightmarish as the imaginary world of these films.” (Kellner, 2001: 165).

The viewers experience a limited sense of terror that allows them to release their anxieties and negative emotions. In his study entitled *Television in Everyday Life* (Silverstone, 1999) which discusses the place that television occupies in modern society, Roger Silverstone cannot fail to notice from the outset the duality of its status, both as a disruptive and a reassuring factor, both as an informant and a misinformant. Following an idea of Anthony Giddens, the author argues that television satisfies certain fundamental human needs and social functions that contribute to the creation of a climate of ontological security. As an inexhaustible source of ritualised images, television functions in a literal and cultural sense as a transitional object that feeds the illusion of control and security, the feeling of living one's existence in a controlled manner. Television mediates threats, the risk that constantly weakens the social system. As a form of defence against the anxieties caused by threats of chaos to its continuity, the social system functions according to a psychological model in which reason overcomes the complex conflicts of the spirit. Even crises and catastrophes are incorporated

into the mythical structures of television, being presented through discussions or fiction that serve to alleviate the anxiety they generate.

Horror films also serve to create the necessary distance between viewers and the various threats to the sense of continuity in the world they live in, absorbing them into their very lives. But while conservative horror films offered reassuring fantasies in which existing authorities and institutions have the ability to eliminate evil, most zombie films no longer offer any guarantee that evil can be suppressed. Since the processes of dehumanisation portrayed in the film are inevitable and irreversible, being contained in the genetic code of human structures, these films would not legitimise contemporary institutions and values but would present violence and social disintegration as omnipresent forces within the social order (Kellner, 2001: 155).

The subtext of apocalyptic zombie scenarios implies the idea of the fragility of human civilisation in the face of unprecedented threats. These fictions express the drama of human society which lacks the social antibodies in its organisation that would allow it to resist the threats arising from within. Mass media, religion, science, and philosophy prove incapable of responding to the threats and dilemmas that alienate the individual in modern society. Clive Barker, himself a writer of horror fiction, comments ironically that since religion has lost its ability to explain reasonably the world we live in, Romero's living dead represent the only possible immortality. This genre of film offers a solution to immortality devoid of the spiritual dimension, serving as a response to the tyranny of the flesh in consumer society. Zombie films are *poems* of corporeality devoid of the transcendent, from which the soul has withdrawn. No religious or moral meaning of suffering sweetens the hell that the characters go through.

3. ZOMBIE HORROR FILMS AND THE TEMPTATION OF A CLOSED SOCIETY: BETWEEN REVOLUTION AND RESTORATION

In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Karl Popper (Popper, 2025) explores the foundations of political philosophy, critically questioning the intellectual tradition that favours totalitarianism. Karl Popper contrasts totalitarian historicism – that belief in the inexorable destiny of society (exemplified by Heraclitus and Plato) – with the ethics of critical dualism (represented by Protagoras and Socrates). The author denounces totalitarianism and mystical anti-rationalism, highlighting how theories such as Plato's, which promote an immobile state ruled by philosopher-kings and divided into rigid castes, oppose the ideals of an open society based on the principles of egalitarianism and individualism, in which people are responsible for their own norms and institutions.

Historical philosophers such as Plato tend to view social change as a destructive force leading to corruption, decay, and degeneration. Plato believed that the fundamental law of historical development was that of degradation, which is part of a cosmic law applicable to all existing things. If the starting point of any change (the Ideal State or the original Form) is perfect and good, then change can only be a movement away from the ideal.

The open society, on the other hand, is characterised by a series of social and political principles that fundamentally distinguish it from tribalism or the closed society. The open society recognises that normative rules and laws are developed and can be changed by humans. This means that humans are morally responsible for them; responsibility cannot be transferred to nature, God, or history. The open society uses reason to plan for security and freedom, accepting that perfection cannot be achieved.

The anxiety felt by people as a result of social disintegration caused by individualism and social change has been exploited by totalitarian movements, with the consequence of encouraging reactionary movements that seek to destroy open civilisation and return it to tribalism. This is why historicist metaphysics which claim that certain things are inevitable are so appealing, because they promise to free people from the burden of their responsibilities. Any utopian ideological project feels an acute horror of life. The closed society is like a utopian engineering project which requires the complete destruction of everything that exists in order to create a perfect and immutable system, but which, due to its lack of experience and its radical nature, inevitably leads to abuse and violence.

A critical reading of zombie horror films aligns with Karl Popper's analysis of the totalitarian tendencies inherent in the idealisation of closed societies. Zombie horror films function as discursive artefacts and spaces of ideological conflict that simultaneously contribute to the reinforcement and circulation of cultural norms, but also to their contestation. The analysis provides sufficient arguments to consider the genre as fundamentally conservative, acting to support the status quo by demonising and destroying the unknown, or radical and transformative, questioning norms and exposing societal fears at the same time.

Parallels can be drawn between Popper's view of collectivism, fear of change, and the way zombies are interpreted as a metaphor for social collapse and alienation. Both the closed society and the horde of zombies pose a threat to subjectivity and individualism. A totalitarian society is based on collectivism, with the individual subordinated to the interests of the whole (the tribe, class, state). The living dead are also defined by massification and anonymisation: they can be the angry mob participating in an insurrection or the anonymous and depersonalised mass of those exploited through labour or consumption. If totalitarianism enshrines the degradation of reason in public life, preaching censorship and the unconditional submission of individuals, zombies represent the ultimate consequence of a world in which reason has failed or has been repressed. The historicist desire to destroy civilisation in order to purify it and model it after a utopian ideal aligns with the apocalyptic vision of zombie films, where the failed system of capitalism is destroyed, though often in order to restore an equally conservative social order. The struggle against totalitarianism described by Popper as a struggle to defend civilisation against forces that demand unconditional obedience and the abandonment of individual responsibility finds a modern resonance in the horror genre. In the zombie apocalypse, the survivors, representing individualism, struggle to maintain a rational and moral order in the face of mass chaos and meaninglessness.

Popular culture is a space marked by contradictions, where resistance clashes with the levelling action of hegemony. Zombie horror films can be read in a conflictualistic framework as manifestos against the massification of the individual, as allegories of the struggle against the bestialising of man, some, such as *The Plague* (2006), as an expression of the will to restructure society from its roots. The plot of this film is simple and naive, illustrating the rejection of the world we live in: Ten years have passed since all the children in the world fell into a deep coma for no apparent reason. One night, these children, now teenagers, who had been in a comatose state until then, wake up and unleash hell on the adults.

Presenting society as the source of these teratological apparitions, these films can be interpreted as a virulent critique in cinematic language of consumer society, entertainment culture – of which, ironically, they themselves are a part – and the constellation of mass media. Because it is relatively undifferentiated and integrative, or zombifying, because individuals are imprinted with similar consumer aspirations and a one-

dimensional vision, all dominated by hedonism and consumerism, mass culture is seen as a decisive force in the terms in which we think about the world, and that is why it is the object of most of the protests. The 1978 sequel to Romero's film, *Night of the Living Dead, Dawn of the Dead*, comes with the novelty of creatures faster than their predecessors from ten years ago and with the same dark sense of humour. The social satire of this film cannot escape us. There is an extended sequence that takes place in a shopping mall where these zombies wander aimlessly through the shops, using the escalators, as if remembering their previous lives. The zombies here are "the archetypal monsters of consumer capitalism", returning to the mall attracted by their superficial desires. They symbolise the debt-based economy, where "slavery is freedom and freedom is slavery" (Luckhursty; 2025: 11). Romero himself suggested that his films are about "the devouring of the old society" and that zombies represent a system in which people consume each other (Kawin, 2012).

Characterised by a schematic narrative and ideological structure, these films lend themselves quite easily to an interpretation in terms of class opposition: "media culture texts are social allegories that express the fears of social classes and groups, their desires and hopes" (Kellner, 2001: 153).

Describing consciousness as a social product, its content not depending on itself, Marx is the first to introduce us to the minefield of ideological class conflicts. Ideological position would be determined by class position, and the dominant ideology in society belongs to the dominant class. However, this class affiliation is disguised. The dominant sectors in production relations have the ability to determine the other sectors to share the content of their consciousness. This transplant generates *the false consciousness* of the dominated, who relate to the world through a consciousness that is not their own. Thus, ideology becomes invisible to the consciousness it shapes, being linked to power inequalities within society. By controlling the means of production or ideological environments – the educational, political and legal systems – the ruling class can easily project its vision of the world onto the consciousness of the subordinate class, which thus comes to understand its status as natural. The prostration of the living dead can be interpreted metaphorically as the effect of transplanting a false consciousness into their minds, and the violent assault on a fragile minority of terrified survivors can be seen as the sublimation of class struggle in its most violent form, the revolt of the masses. The masses contaminated by rage represent the nightmarish embodiment of the social body's fears of anomie. Zombies represent the lower class or the starving proletariat rising up against the privileged elites. This opposition is rendered through the primal act of cannibalism, which becomes an index of savage otherness towards the class enemy and a form of social destruction.

Night of the Living Dead (1968) openly addressed racial issues and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. It is no coincidence that humans can be more beastly than monsters in the finale of *Night of the Living Dead*, where the rush to sterilise the infection takes the form of a bloody repression whose victim is the only survivor, a young black man. It is relevant to mention that in the same year the film was released, in 1968, Martin Luther King, the champion of the fight for racial desegregation and other basic civil rights for black Americans, was assassinated in Memphis. The film can be seen as an expression of the white population's feelings, who saw their positions threatened by the legitimate demands of African Americans. The shocking ending, in which the black character (Ben) is shot by a sheriff's militia, can be interpreted in this way, with Romero using this scene to challenge white supremacy.

The dialectic between public and private space (Kellner, 2001: 157) is also an important articulation of this film genre. These spaces can overlap, generating conflicts.

People share the public space of television, the mass media and popular culture. This type of artificial community is fragile; without the technology that supports communication, it easily dissolves. In Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, we see redundant images of characters obsessively watching television or listening to the radio in an attempt to explain the situation in which they are trapped. In *I Am Legend* (2007), the hero experiences the drama of shipwreck and loneliness in the world, developing the beginnings of schizophrenia fuelled by exposure to television. The television series *Dead Set* gives voice to fears that television can take control of people's minds, so the zombie pandemic overlaps with the hysteria surrounding the Big Brother phenomenon. The image of cameras watching everything becomes the film's leitmotif, possibly a reaction to the fear that new technologies have invaded the privacy of individuals and families, monopolising, alienating and controlling them. This narrative device critically exposes the morbid voyeurism that characterises the behaviour of avid horror film consumers.

Another sensational element exploited by zombie films is the familiarity of the victim and the aggressor. Family unity is torn apart by the epidemic, so we often see scenes in which children devour their parents or husbands cannibalise their wives. The family is a key structure that is frequently attacked because it represents the basic unit of social 'normality'. The horror increasingly comes from within the family, where the oppressive behavioural patterns of bourgeois society, such as rigid submission to patriarchal values, produce monsters. Ultimately, although horror films are often confined to formal structures that can repress their radical meanings, they can still expose the tensions necessary for progressive change in the real world (Williams, 1996). After their metamorphosis into zombies, the characters lose all moral responsibility. One may say that the loss of this moral sense of man, the loss of his species instinct, does not need to be covered by exceptional situations such as those presented in the film, because in the real world it has already happened. To paraphrase one of the characters in the British film *28 Days Later*, these films do not talk about any infection that we have not already known, with people killing people, incest and parricide characterising the normal state of humanity. There is nothing new. Using these scenes, these films relativise the taboos of the patriarchal family that had remained untouched until then in popular culture.

But consumer culture is above all the place where the permanent hegemonic effort to maintain the majority consensus towards the system to which it is subordinate takes place:

"Hegemony is necessary because the social experience of dominated groups constantly contradicts the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology constantly intersects with resistances that it must overcome. This resistance can be overcome but not completely eliminated. (...) Any consensus that prevails is necessarily unstable." (Fiske, 2002: 222).

These films act on the individual's perception, feeding both their fears and their need for security. Even if it is not always presented, the solution is present subtextually. These are films that offer the alternative of a closed society that provides protection, most often armed, in exchange for the renunciation of some fundamental civil rights. There are films that indirectly advocate established values, codifying conservative and statist discourses in violent language. Zombie films present an allegorical spectacle of the accelerated disintegration of social order. The allegory of the city under siege is one of the elements that explains the effectiveness of this genre of film in manipulating the public and cultivating a sense of loyalty to symbolically endangered values.

According to Baudrillard, everyday life is constantly fed by the violence consumed in the apocalyptic substance of the mass media (Baudrillard, 2005). The affinity between violence and the obsession with security is not accidental. Violence consumed in homeopathic doses saves the moral and social order. John Fiske and John Hartley believe that the violence so prevalent on television is in fact “a semiotic category, a vehicle through which meanings are transferred” (Hartley & Fiske, 1999: 177). More specifically, violence stages essentially abstract social relationships and conflicts between the central and the deviant. More interestingly, the authors consider violence to be essentially conservative and non-destructive, because morality or common-sense triumphs in one way or another. The function of violence on television is to liquidate sources of social tension that would otherwise be insoluble. Fiske’s contribution to the study of cultural consumption can be summarised by two concepts he uses in his ideological analysis, namely dislocation, representing the phenomenon whereby “...a subject or anxiety is repressed, either psychologically or ideologically, and concern for it can only be expressed by dislocating it onto a subject, legitimate anxiety from a social perspective” and incorporation, which refers to “the process by which the dominant classes (...) incorporate resistance into the dominant ideology, depriving the dominated classes of the opposition they might bring” (Fiske, 2002: 228). Often, the formal mechanisms of the genre, such as excessive violence and special effects, are used to “repress revolutionary perspectives” and channel repressed ideas in a socially safe manner. Contested discourse is often incorporated into the dominant ideology, neutralising opposition. This is how horror films displace class discontent by transforming it into the more legitimate anxiety about the possibility of a sanitary apocalypse, and this explains how the protest language of the original films was converted into the service of a foreign and reactionary ideology. Through a phenomenon of displacement, films camouflage real problems in fantastical scenarios in which a cataclysm, a scourge, threatens the fragile harmony of a community.

Zombie films have always depicted diseases of the social body. There is a subtle link between social anxieties and conservative hegemonic discourse, with certain social classes (young people, workers) being portrayed unfavourably as a direct threat to the middle-class way of life. The living dead also represent the fear of otherness and racial difference. The fear of the other as a member of a different race is linked to the fear produced by members of the working class. The monsters in zombie films are monstrous only in relation to the normality of the white middle class (Kellner, 2001:168). Monsters are embodiments of the other, allegorically representing the race and movements that threaten the stability of the middle class. The film can also be read as a fear of the disintegration of the bourgeois lifestyle.

Since the 1960s, the zombie master has disappeared as a character, with the creatures acting as a threat beyond any control. The suggestion seems to be that the enemy has moved from outside to inside the group, with the diffuse threat now coming from among us. Zombie films are dark, nightmarish dystopias, stories in which the other, the stranger, appears menacingly from within the socio-economic system to terrorise and threaten to destroy the existing order.

Horror films could be considered a reactionary genre because they prefer to look elsewhere for reasons to explain the difficulties society is going through, ignoring the real sources of the problems and blaming the disintegration of society on nebulous causes. They can also be considered the secretion of a reactionary ideology because they envision the solution to the fragility and insecurity of the world we live in by giving up some freedoms within a closed, quasi-totalitarian society, a phrase coined by Austrian sociologist

K. R. Popper. The dilemma these horror films pose is this: how many of these freedoms are we willing to give up in exchange for a climate of ontological security?

4. CONCLUSIONS

Our suspicion that fantasy and entertainment can be important sources for a diagnosis of contemporary society has been confirmed. These fictions featuring bloody monsters are the product of the era in which they were created, reflecting visions of the world and human existence. As privileged expressions of popular culture, these dark stories simultaneously mediate the thesis and antithesis, being symbolic spaces in which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses confront each other. These films can be read either as carriers of reactionary messages, because they nostalgically evoke, under the guise of destruction, fundamental values of society, or as expressions of the will to restructure society.

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