

## Call for Papers

25 febbraio 2024

## Zombesque Sociosemiotics of a cultural epidemic

*Edited by Andrea Bernardelli, Federico Montanari, Eduardo Grillo*



Heraclitus already talked about the “undead” in his days, but he couldn’t imagine zombie hordes walking on our cities’ streets (Tirino 2018; Riley 2015; Orpana 2011). It was simply a metaphor, then as now, but perhaps at this point it became something more (from myth to symbol? a figure, in Auerbach’s sense?). Firmly in place in our collective imagery, the zombie travelled a long walk from Haiti’s nights to our screens, and now it populates almost all fields of knowledge, from philosophy to sociology, from media studies to epidemiology. However, semiotics has rarely studied zombies, except for a brief mention in *Apocalittici e integrati* by Umberto Eco (1964), a dense essay by Paolo Fabri (2021) and few other cases.

The time is right now to develop an extensive discussion about a figure who upsets our imagination and challenges our taxonomies. Moreover, the zombie seems to be often effective in representing fears, new contingencies, even the daily habits of human beings in the 21st century; after all, the zombie has evolved in the last few years, and adapted itself to the new social conditions. So, it seems worth to semiotically examine the zombie’s figure, its extreme plasticity and ultimately its ability to represent a society who actually seems more and more *zombesque*.

*Here are a few starting points for a reflection:*

- A zombie is neither alive, nor dead, stuck in a transition which calls to mind complex bioethical issues, as well as the attempts to artificially extend the duration of our life (Fabbri 2021). In which way this unsettling neutrality anticipate our future, or conversely embodies the ancient fear of revenants (Ariès 1975; Murphy 2008; Reyn-olds 2009; Nizzo 2018)?
- Always more frequently, the zombie metaphorically indicates our relationships with consumptions, future, sleep time (Crary 2013), or our electronic devices. Are they appropriate analogies? To what extent are we dead walking already?
- Since Romero's movies, zombies move as a herd: there is no individual. On the other hand, *I Am Legend* showed us a zombie group with a leader, and the first Haitian zombies were single slaves. Is a zombie individual possible? Or is a zombie precisely the reverse side of any individuation process (Ronchi 2015)? Cognitive philosophers use the zombie figure in order to study consciousness and the mind-body problem. What can semiotics tell about these reflections? And which relationship between individual and collectivity the undead represents? Are zombies really a picture of democracy taken to its extreme consequences (Fabbri 2021)? Lastly: in which way can we talk about zombies' gender identity (Greene, Meyer 2014)? Is a zombie necessarily an "it" or not (Flores Ohlson 2018; 2019; 2020)?
- Recent TV series (*Les revenants*, for instance) show us quite different zombies as compared to prototypical ones. Sometimes they don't have a decaying flesh and, above all, they are able to speak. Are they proper zombies? Can a zombie properly communicate? What their lack of articulate language tells us about communication in contemporary societies?
- In many cases, zombies come back from the dead because of an epidemic spread; and the very zombification process is an epidemic itself. Some medical works has already studied zombie outbreak as a model to understand real relentless epidemics (Smith 2015). Beyond these useful thought experiments, what do the zombies suggest us about contagion and (failed) interpersonal adjustment (Landowski)? Moreover: during the acute stage of the pandemic, Covid-19 deniers or protesters used the zombie metaphor to indicate the compliance with the new rules of conduct; but this figurative argumentation can be reversed, of course. Which are the relationships between the zombie and the new awareness of our exposure in front of pandemics?
- The ironic and metafictional movie *The Dead Don't Die* (2019) connects a zombie outbreak with climate change's effects. Are there real relationships between the zombie figure and a climatic apocalypse? Does the zombie represent our blind stubbornness only, or does it work also well for other aspects of climatic risk (Oloff 2012; Bulfin 2017; Brereton 2020)?

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## Deadline

Abstract submission: **31 May 2024**

Abstract acceptance: **30 June 2024**

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**The abstract should be sent jointly to the three editors:**

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## Informations

- The abstract must be approximately 160 words, and must be submitted in both Italian and English.
- Accepted languages: Italian, English, French.
- The acceptance of the articles and their publication is subject to double blind peer review.
- There are no official limits of length to the articles, yet we recommend 40.000 characters as a reasonable maximum measure (including spaces, notes and references);
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