



UDC 811.111'42:32=111

791.43:316(73)=111

Original scientific article

Accepted for publication on 25.11.2020

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The Otherness and the Consumer: External and internal horror as rhetorical framing devices on the silver screen and in real time

This paper aims to analyze the main paradigms of the horror genre and their equivalents in the conservative – liberal political division in the United States by exploring the dominant political rhetoric and its specific framing devices as mirrored in horror cinema. The analysis focuses on two distinct celluloid works by John Carpenter: *The Thing* (1982), and *They Live* (1988), themselves constructed as subversive commentaries on the carefully intertwined American and global culture of fear and consumerism. The framing devices include the division of citizens based on race and other characteristics, the “us vs. them” mentality, negation of (inter)national unity and coexistence, the symbolism of the color red, as well as repetition and hyperbole. As powerful persuasive tools in the hands of the political elite, these devices influence the US citizens by appealing to their beliefs. These beliefs are based on models of morality (Lakoff 2002). The dualism of horror is also discussed, i.e. external versus internal horror (the Otherness outside and the alien within in Ognjanović 2016), and the way in which the binary quality of the genre informs and guides cinematic artworks in their exploration of society, especially one fraught with political and social issues. The paper investigates why the two analyzed films are important for a discussion of contemporary American society and how the horror genre can be seen as a prism through which various issues can be explored.

Key words: political discourse; rhetorical device; framing; horror; Otherness; consumerism; *The Thing* (1982); *They Live* (1988).



1. Introduction

There has always been an unlikely but strong connection between politics and the horror genre, and the discussion on whether horror is designed to essentially serve or upset the status quo has entered the realm of film theory, philosophy of art, ethnoanthropology, and linguistics (Carroll 1990; Ognjanović 2016).

The focus on horror has provided ample entertainment for worldwide audiences, which in turn transformed this genre into a fertile ground for the representation of various, often politicized ideas. Entertainment, however, is only one of the functions of the horror genre. Periodically, horror emerges as the go-to genre in times of social stress. Horror films are capable of incorporating general social anxieties into their iconography of fear and distress. Thus, these films provide an adequate expression of the shared anxieties (Carroll 1990: 207).

Perhaps more than any other genre, horror beckons mainstream audience in turbulent times. Carroll (1990: 1) notes that, in the post-Vietnam era, horror had flourished as a major source of mass aesthetic stimulation. He defines it as the most widely disseminated and persistent genre since the 1970s, when horror entered the cultural mainstream. However, the genre has enjoyed other periods of immense popularity before. Specifically, it acted as an antidote for the traumatic events that had plagued the Western civilization in the last century: German Expressionism borne out of the crisis milieu of the Weimar Republic, the Universal Monsters cycle during the Great Depression, and the 1950s films about scientific experiments gone awry and alien invasions during the Cold War all used horrific imagery to express social anxieties immanent to their times (Carroll 1990: 208).

The reason why horror is extremely popular even in the first decades of the 21st century seems to lie in the fact that it is designed to elicit strong emotion – fear in particular. American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft has famously said that “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown”. By tapping into its primal source of emotion, the horror audience reaches satisfaction in the overflow of senses caused by a specific nerve-racking scene. Carroll (1990: 167) argues that contemporary surroundings play a major role in the allure of horror – primal thrills and fears that were common to our ancestors are rare, and being aesthetically thrilled or frightened by the consumption of horror fiction relieves the emotional blandness of modern life.

As noted by Carroll (1990), the “other side of the coin” is social stress, which provides another, unseen emotional challenge adequately addressed by horror. In short, the biological impetus for survival might be dormant, but our evolution has



brought an equivalent amount of social urgency. Therefore, the second, diametrically opposite foundation for the attractiveness of the horror genre is the cathartic release of stress caused by global events. This can explain the latest resurgence of mainstream horror-themed entertainment in both cinema and TV (e.g. the rebirth of the zombie subgenre in *World War Z*, *The Walking Dead*, and similar works). Moreover, to reflect the unprecedented dystopian turn of events happening in global politics, climate change, etc., horror has changed its roots based on the imaginary. Films such as *Get Out* and *The Purge* have been positing a worst-case scenario that is more akin to reality than a fantastic singular occurrence (Edelstein 2018). For Tensley (2019), recent politically charged cinematic offerings such as *Ready or Not*, *Us* and *Parasite*, the themes of which deal with class conflict, provide an opportunity for collective comfort in the bewildering present.

Carroll (1990: 214) summarizes the allure of horror in times of social turmoil:

Since the horror genre is, in a manner of speaking, founded upon the disturbance of cultural norms, both conceptual and moral, it provides a repertory of symbolism for those times in which the cultural order—albeit at a lower level of generality—has collapsed or is perceived to be in a state of dissolution. Thus, horror, a genre which may typically only command a limited following—due to its basic powers of attraction—can command mass attention when its iconography and structures are deployed in such a way that they articulate the widespread anxiety of times of stress.

Horror and politics are in a symbiotic and mutually inspiring relationship. Just as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* provided a cultural term for dire situations usually assigned to the opposing party in the Reagan era,¹ the contemporary horror franchise *The Purge* provided a slogan for the re-election campaign of the 45th US president Donald Trump. “Keep America Great” is the tagline of the third entry in the mass homicidal franchise, titled *Purge: Election Year*, which came out in 2016, and despite its sinister connotations, Trump claimed it as his next slogan in early 2017 (Stolworthy 2017; Milbank 2018). The film deals with a near dystopian future, where all crimes are legal for one night, and Milbank (2018) points to some of the parallels between the portrayal of a white, nationalist government in the film and the US leadership in reality, in a radical case of “life imitates art”.

¹ The documentary “Never Sleep Again“ (Farrands & Kasch 2010), on the enveloping legacy of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, showed the ubiquitous nature of the term permeating the American and global culture soon after the first sequel. For example, in a footage possibly from a Correspondents’ Dinner, Ronald Reagan tells a joke involving the phrase: “When you take a walk down our opposition’s memory lane, it starts to look like ‘A Nightmare on Elm Street’”.



The paper explores the parallels between the recent political rhetoric in the US and two horror films from the 1980s that speak to the present via various visual and thematic means. The two films at the center of the analysis are *The Thing* (1982) and *They Live* (1988), both defining works in the opus of American director and composer John Carpenter. The analysis will compare several rhetorical devices used in speeches and other addresses of former president Donald Trump and their multimodal equivalents in the cinematic realm of Carpenter horror. The goal of the paper is twofold: first, to reexamine Carpenter's two seminal films in light of their politically and socially relevant commentary on American society, and second, to recognize the horror genre as a powerful conduit for the portrayal of political and social currents that have shaped the first century of this medium, and the first two decades of the 21st century. The tone of the horror genre and the tone of society usually mirror each other, and horror can be seen as crucial to the examination of the society at large, especially when that society is in turmoil.

Thus, the aim of the paper is to show why we need to revisit these and other seminal artworks to find parallels with our present and review our socially-formed realities and identities. They are the creative ways in which visionaries and auteurs, Carpenter included, critiqued and commented on a society in times of drastic transformations, or in times where they indicated that a change is necessary. Watching faux realities on screen means opening up to possibilities of a finer and more articulated discussion on social and political issues in real life.

In the following section, we will provide an overview of models of morality and the importance of effective framing, the binary political opposition in the US, and the paradigms of fear. The two analyzed films will constitute the dual-case study in Section 3, in which we will offer a short explanation of plots and themes of the films. The explanation will be followed by a comparison of the examples of the rhetoric used by the former US president Donald Trump, collected from various digital sources in the time period of 2015 to 2020 (which encompasses his candidacy and presidency), and multimodal rhetorical devices in the analyzed films. In the final section, an overall conclusion on the ways in which these dualities interact will be given, along with a few suggestions for continuing and expanding the research on connections between the horror genre and politics.



2. Theoretical framework

2.1. *Models of morality and political framing*

Horror is closely connected to the values we hold dear and are afraid of losing. To understand the effects that horror can have on us, we need to shed light on two fundamental models of behavior which subconsciously motivate people in their daily lives, and especially in their political views. These are the “Strict Father” and “Nurturant Parent” models of morality, as explained by Lakoff (2002). The two models are closely connected to human values particularly important to Americans – family and fatherhood, for which the metaphor NATION IS A FAMILY serves as part of the conceptual system. Lakoff (2004: 156) sees this metaphor not only as deeply engraved into American history but also as a model to construe its present. It underlies expressions like “the Founding Fathers”, as well as more contemporary references to Americans as “sons” being sent to war. The American nation is viewed as a family where the government acts as a parental figure over its citizens or “children”, and, depending on the worldview, that family is seen through conservative or liberal lens, with accompanying beliefs.

The two main conceptual metaphors connected to these views are: MORALITY IS STRENGTH (“Strict Father”) and MORALITY IS NURTURANCE (“Nurturant Parent”). If one considers strength as the more important quality, that person is more likely to lean towards the conservative party – similarly, if someone considers the nurturance metaphor to be more central to their own worldview, that person will probably align more with the liberal party (Kövecses 2007).

Therefore, the American citizenry aligns itself with the Democratic or the Republican party, depending on the moral belief it finds appropriate. Lakoff (2002: 82) posits that the model “Strict Father” maintains a system of moral responsibility for the well-being of the dependent person. This system has consequences outside politics. In the modern world order, it allows the USA to justify its patronizing relationship to others; viz. the USA takes on the role of the strict figure on top of the pyramid, whereas the developing countries/nations are construed as (disobedient) children (Charteris-Black 2005: 234). This is one of the greatest differences between the two dominant American political parties. One understands the political space as a hierarchically organized building, where those on the political-economic bottom have to obey the elite (in this case, the “morally progressive USA”). The other attempts to nurture equality and independence among all participants in a discourse and builds support programs for the economically subordinate classes. The images that the corresponding language evokes closely follow and simultaneously



create the desired political effect.

Lakoff (2002; 2004) sees the key advantage of conservatives over liberals in their competent use of old ideas, creation of new ideas, and input of both into the American subconscious. The Republican spin that conservatives put on every complex concept to make it attractive to broader masses is composed of a handful of ideas that go together with the conservative concept of politics. Lakoff (2004) explains this phenomenon with the cognitive phenomenon of hypocognition – the shortage of ideas, that is, the lack of relatively simple frames, which are easy to evoke with a word or two. In simpler terms, while the conservatives evoke an entire frame in the mind of the public with a simple phrase like *tax relief*, the liberal *hoch Politisch* finds it difficult to explain the Democratic approach because they use too many complex words and sentences, i.e. ineffective framing.

The simplicity and effectiveness of the way the conservatives use language can be linked back to the core of their beliefs. The American family, seen through the conservative lens, is a wholesome unit, the qualities of which are a subject of envy from outsiders. The liberals see family as a loose-knit fabric, made of diverse and equally important threads, which can be built and improved upon. As we will see in the following section, this distinction ties to the dualistic nature of horror, where the difference between the two viewpoints dictates the origin of a possible threat to the American way of life: from the outside or from within.

2.2. Horror paradigms: *The Otherness vs. Oneself*

The conservative/liberal dichotomy is related to the issue of external vs. internal horror. This division is based on the main division of human fear depicted in the horror genre, as noted by John Carpenter (2001: 6). In an interview for the famed horror magazine “Fangoria”, he stated the following:

Essentially, in horror there are two seminal stories that we tell over and over again. There are two tales we tell each other about evil – for what is horror, really, than a story about evil of one sort or another? In story number one, the evil comes from beyond, from outside the Tribe, from the darkness out there farther on than our flickering light can reach. The evil is the dreaded Other, the Outsider, the Alien. In story number two, evil comes from within. It can be found in our own hearts. In this story, we are all capable of extraordinary evil given just the right circumstances.

Thus, two basic paradigms exist in the horror genre, upon which characteristic plots are built:



- Fear of Otherness (physical and mental invasion), and
- Fear of Oneself (betrayal from one's own psyche or body).

In the analysis by Ognjanović (2016: 352–353),² the first paradigm, “Fear of Otherness”, is fear from an outside agent, a monster that threatens human existence in some manner, by either possessing the body, immediate surroundings (home) or the broader circle of the human microcosm (village, suburbia, town). The classic examples are *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *Body Snatchers* by Jack Finney, along with their numerous adaptations, as well as George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and *Alien* by Ridley Scott (1979), to name a few. Common denominators for these and other examples are feelings of paranoia, xenophobia, distrust, and are based on the formula “us/we versus them”.

The root of the second paradigm, “Fear of Oneself”, can be found in the individual psyche, a compromised, dual sense of being that is, consciously or subconsciously, recognized as harmful for itself and others. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in its various adaptations can be presented as a classic example, as well as Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* in 1960 (Norman Bates’ split personality), *American Werewolf in London* (1981), and others. The fear of one’s own being can be purely psychological, but it can also be grounded in physical reality (bodily transformations, visceral changes in the Cronenbergian sense, etc.). The formula of the second paradigm is “I against myself”.

We have established that the horror genre thrives on strong emotions it elicits in the audience. The presence of emotions depends on the belief system each audience participant possesses, which enables him/her to view and judge a certain situation/scene as potentially harmful for the protagonists in a film, with whom the spectator achieves or should achieve a certain connection. The link between our emotions and belief is noted by Carroll (1990: 61), who remarks that “specifiable cognitive elements – most easily construed as beliefs – are essentially constitutive of the identity of a given emotion”. The belief systems, as emotions, can be vastly different from one person to another, and in the case of the US, these systems fall into the political/moral dichotomy of conservatism and liberalism. The horror paradigms have strong parallels in the dual political reality of the USA, as the core po-

² With the slight omission of the third paradigm, which the author extrapolates from the paradigm element of Otherness, which is “Fear of the Numinous” (the indescribable, amorphous threat from the outside). This paradigm, we believe, is simply a variant of the original paradigm, and thus not useful for the present research. In addition, the order of the paradigms has been adjusted to reflect Carpenter’s division of horror.



litical values have been thoroughly reflected and presented in this genre. Therefore, the two key approaches in horror (Ognjanović 2016: 355) are:

- the conservative, which essentially supports the status quo – the community versus the outer evil
- the liberal, which reexamines the status quo by relativizing the values of the community – the community with internal evil

The conservative treatment of the first paradigm, Ognjanović (2016: 358–359) continues, is governed by the principle of short-term existence: the Otherness event (the disruptance of the normal way of life) is presented as an episode, diversion, exception in an otherwise well-organized, anthropocentric world. The temporary disruption of the microverse does not change it irreversibly – rather, the values of the locality are reaffirmed and strengthened. The liberal approach to the paradigm treats human values from a non-anthropocentric standpoint: the Otherness serves to reevaluate the human norm that has hitherto been taken for granted, and the resulting conflict does not come from the Otherness itself, but rather from inner commotion. Such films are almost all apocalyptic in nature (e.g. the Romero zombie collection), and do not allow normalcy to reign over the world after the disruption by the Otherness. *They Live*, for example, ultimately ends on a bleak note despite the small victory by its main protagonist – the world was taken over with the help of humans themselves, and as such cannot be saved from its own inherent traits based on greed and the value of personal wealth at the expense of the community.

The conservative approach to the paradigm “Fear of Oneself” is rooted in the fear of the atavistic, animalistic, and irrational, while it sees the rational mind as the ideal and condemns any sort of experimentation with “God’s business”. The Otherness is completely devoid of the reason for existence – it is the opposite of human and deserves only destruction. In short, the normalcy of the status quo is to be cherished and preserved at all costs. The liberal approach to the second paradigm, on the other hand, favors the irrational as the ending – such as Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, where the inner Otherness is an unstoppable force that cannot be beaten. These cinematic works usually end on a bleak note due to the irreversible change shown on the big screen in the end. One of the classic examples is Carpenter’s *The Thing*, where the ambiguous ending serves as a valuable commentary on the powerlessness of the human race when confronted with the irrational side of horror that threatens the entire civilization. Definitions of humanity and human identity are fundamentally destabilized by the alien organism’s infiltration and duplication of living beings (both human and others), thus making the man’s position in the uni-



verse, and even on the planet, essentially unsustainable (Ognjanović 2016: 356–367).

The double duality (liberal/conservative and Otherness/Oneself) reflects on the position of horror in the larger social and political context of the contemporary cultural milieu: the servitude of terrific images and ideas to the leading political thought or its manifestation as a protest against social repression have divided the critics and theorists who find compelling examples for both points of view. In the end, it can be said that, depending on the subgenre, or even on an individual work in the realm of horror fiction, this genre can be viewed as both the agent of the established order, and as an ideological tool in the service of progressive political themes (Carroll 1990: 198).

3. The Otherness and The Consumer: A dual case study

Even though the opus of John Carpenter has numerous entries that can be discussed in politically subversive terms (films such as *Escape from New York* and its sequel *Escape from L.A.* both deal with the fall of the American society³), the two films discussed in this paper contain some of the most powerful ideological imagery known to the horror genre. This imagery can provide useful subjects of comparison with the recent political rhetoric.

In addition to the horror prefix, both films have elements of other genres, most discernibly science fiction and thriller. While *The Thing* offers copious amounts of body horror with supernatural aspects, which, in the decades since its release, became regarded as a cult silver screen offering, *They Live* can be described as a subliminal horror/sci-fi thriller with offbeat overtones. In this sense, Wilson (2015: 7) sees *They Live* in particular as a piece of cult cinema defined by social, cultural, and political critique. However, “cult” does not mean opposite of “mainstream” in this case. These films have outgrown their initial cinematic constraints, spawning a prequel, soundtrack vinyl reissues, board games, and a reboot announced in 2020 (in the case of *The Thing*), and a growing recognition of powerful themes tackled in *They Live* (political commentary through visual means, the recognition of its messages as a protest against the governing elite). This points to their multi-level marketing growth reminiscent of enormous franchises like *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*, albeit in a more restrained manner. They have permeated popular culture with countless reiterations, homages, and references in other films, series, graphic

³ We are aware of Carpenter’s own dismissal of consciously making such films, however, *They Live* stands out as his explicit political commentary (Woods 2004: 30).



novels, and books, thus becoming an important part of the contemporary cultural vernacular.

The starting point of the study is a short explanation of the film plots, after which we will attempt to draw parallels between the recent political language in the USA dominated by the Republican party and president Donald Trump, and ideas presented in the films via both verbal and non-verbal rhetorical mechanisms, in line with multimodal possibilities of the media of cinema (more in Forceville & Urios-Aparisi 2009). The examples of political language are sampled in the 2015–2020 time period from official candidate and presidential addresses in various situations and contexts, as well as statements on the social platform Twitter, which has provided a daily link between the US president and his constituents and effectively, his audience.

3.1. *The Thing* (1982)⁴

Based on the short story *Who Goes There?* by John W. Campbell, and itself a remake of a film similarly titled in the 1950s, *The Thing* follows events in an American outpost in Antarctica after its crew realizes that a defrosted alien has the power to devour, transform, and mimic living beings, including humans. The Americans are essentially trapped in the outpost while one by one gets preyed on by the xenomorph and processed to look exactly like the real person, only with alien DNA and unknown agenda. The certainty of physical appearance disappears in the face of gore-filled events throughout the film; comrades in a remote place suddenly turn against each other in a whodunit horror game of blood tests and flame throwers, and the film becomes, in Carpenter's own words "the study of the effects of fear on a human being" (Le Blanc & Odell 2011: 59).

The film starts with a hunt across the icy Antarctic desert – a group of Norwegians attempt to capture a dog who seems to have escaped their station and runs towards the neighboring US outpost. The Norwegians die during the pursuit and the dog finds safety with the Americans. However, it soon reveals its predatory nature by killing and assimilating the outpost's own dogs, and the team burns the creature in the middle of a transformation. Blair, the only scientist in the group, examines the malformed corpse and estimates that a possible infection could spread over all living beings on the planet in the span of a few years. The crew discovers the alien spaceship crash site and a smaller excavation site out of which the other

⁴ The trailer for *The Thing* retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p35JDJLa9ec>. Accessed: 30 August 2020.



station had unearthed the alien. When a team member is attacked by the cadaver, Blair sabotages all the station's vehicles and the radio in an attempt to isolate the infection. The number of men rapidly drops amidst the growing fear and horrifying transformations, and after the team leader MacReady sabotages the creature's attempt at building a spacecraft underground, while also destroying the base, he is joined by the missing team member Childs in the wake of the destruction, neither of them believing in the other one's human nature.

Essentially, the film deals with stolen human identities and the idea of a hidden opposition behind the superficial appearance of sameness.⁵ It offers not only an analysis of the growing paranoia, but also presents a step-by-step screen case study of the division of like-minded individuals through fear. Even one of its taglines "Look closely at your neighbour ... Trust no-one ... They might be THE THING" is essentially a warning issued against the Other. Furthermore, its main theme of contagion through an unknown virus/invisible means has been identified as another layer of reading in the pandemic-saturated discourse in 2020 (Myles 2020; Collins 2020; Murray 2020).

Next to the alien creature, the human crew and the Antarctic, along with the research station, represent the main characters of the film. Burn (2005) argues that the vast space of the Antarctic and the increasing decomposition of the outpost represent alien territory tied to the visual narratives of American and British exploration and conquest. The drive to delineate the known territory from the unknown, simultaneously stretching the border further, has its roots in American colonial iconography, the remnants of which Burn (2005) sees in visual and aural cues in the film: from MacReady's sombrero to the soundtrack by Ennio Morricone, with its spaghetti western associations. The ending of the film, with two mutually distrustful characters, can be viewed as a microcosm of America - an image that, according to Grant (2004: 14) carries an extreme burden of meaning and eschews the resolution of inherited narrative dilemmas, and one that comments on the anxiety about race relations in the US (MacReady is white, and Childs is Black).

⁵ A similar theme is present in the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, based on the aforementioned novel by Jack Finney, and with several adaptations (1956, 1978, and 1993), all of which explore the consequences of a silent alien invasion in which humans are replaced with alien "pod-people". However, the main differences lie in the visceral quality of assimilation in *The Thing*, ambiguous motivation of the creature (taking into account that it attempted to build another spacecraft, presumably to fly off the planet), and the setting, which becomes a character itself in the rising atmosphere of fear and isolation.



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By comparing the characteristics of the political climate in the US with the main story points in *The Thing*, several frames emerge:

Frame 1. Division of citizens/nations based on political, racial, and religious profiling:

- (1) *So the Democrats want open borders. Let everybody come in. Let everybody pour in. We don't care. Let them come in from the Middle East; let them come in from all over the place.* (Donald Trump, campaign rally speech in Minnesota, June 2018. Retrieved from: <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-political-rally-duluth-minnesota-june-20-2018>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)
- (2) *Joe Biden recently raised his hand on the debate stage and promised he was going to give it away — your health care dollars — to illegal immigrants, which will bring massive numbers of immigrants into our country. Massive numbers will pour into our country in order to get all the goodies that they want to give. Education, health care, everything.* (Donald Trump, Republican National Convention speech, August 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/us/politics/trump-rnc-speech-transcript.html>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)

Once the protagonists of the film are introduced to the alien creature and its capabilities, the established appearances and characters dissipate in the metamorphosis which sometimes happens off-screen and renders all characters unreliable as humans, which is the established and preferred norm. Similarly, in the second decade of the 21st century, the average white, Christian, well-situated conservative voter no longer constituted the majority of the total population of the USA: other races, nationalities, religions, and even gender identities (non-binary and trans citizens) started to influence the voting structure by voting mostly Democrat, whose liberal views were more aligned with their own personal beliefs and interests, thus “threatening” the traditional Republican base. This was perceived as an attack on conservative values (the Strict Father model) during the relatively prosperous years under a Democratic president. As Lakoff (2016) points out, the conservatives felt pressured by “political correctness” which framed their views as wrong and suppressed their “free speech”, so Trump’s disregard of correct terms and views was seen as the right path in an increasingly uncomfortable political environment. Therefore, instead of embracing the diversification of the US and the world, the conservatives, through their representative in the Oval Office, “returned” the voice to their voter base by dividing the citizenship and opposing them to the “aliens”



who aimed to take their privileged positions in the society with the help of liberals. Framing the opposition through the lens of the Otherness effectively enabled the conservatives to divide the already frail American nation into strong trenches without any possibility of interplay, as the Otherness is perceived as detrimental to the traditional family values of the conservatives.

Frame 2. The “us vs. them” mentality:

- (3) *When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.* (Donald Trump, Presidential Announcement speech, June 2015. Retrieved from: <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)
- (4) *You had some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides.* (Donald Trump, statement on Charlottesville, May 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/05/08/very-fine-people-charlottesville-who-were-they-2/>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)

The United States are no longer deemed prosperous and grand enough for everyone who wanted to pursue the “American Dream”. Instead, “true” Americans, through a carefully knitted web of verbal banalities, were suddenly given a reason why they were losing their jobs and homes – their situation was solely the fault of foreigners (mostly from the South – Mexico and other countries), who came into their country and took over their livelihoods. By using derogative names and insults for numerous other countries during the elections and his four years of presidency, Trump not only differentiated between the American citizens and other people, he painted the latter as lesser humans – beings devoid of classic human traits and unworthy of compassion. As Lakoff and Duran (2018) note, the former president possesses a masterful skill of defaming entire groups of people (Hispanic Americans, Middle Eastern Americans) as liars, rapists, terrorists - or in the case of US law enforcement and intelligence agencies – agents of corruption (when convenient for his goals). In addition, these claims are often masked through the use of apophasis, which is a rhetorical device where the speaker mentions an issue (thus evoking the desired framing) by pretending to deny its properties (more on apophatic rhetoric of Trump in Gradečak-Erdeljić & Gudurić 2017). The resulting sentence not only conceptualizes the desired effect in the minds of the listeners – it



also absolves the speaker of any kind of responsibility for his controversial remarks.

In (4), Trump spoke about the alt-right protests in Charlottesville in 2017, when Heather Heyer, a young woman and counter-protester, was killed by a white supremacist. The same sentiment was reflected in a statement about the protests against the lockdown measures in states such as Michigan in early 2020. In both cases, the violence and insubordination of Republican supporters were relativized due to their “correct” political affinity. Therefore, citizens are judged solely on their physical appearance (race/nationality, in the case of Mexicans) and beliefs (physical and moral superiority of white Americans, in the case of the alt-right movement), and the Other becomes the only trait upon which actions are weighed.

Frame 3. There is no peace or coexistence with the Otherness/only Republican/American/human is good:

- (5) *America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism.* (Donald Trump, speech to the U.N. General Assembly, September 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.vox.com/2018/9/25/17901082/trump-un-2018-speech-full-text>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)
- (6) *In the left's backward view, they do not see America as the most free, just and exceptional nation on Earth.* (Donald Trump, Republican National Convention speech, August 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/us/politics/trump-rnc-speech-transcript.html>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)

The framing of America as being finally “fed up” with equality with other nations and countries evokes the imagery of its privilege over the rest of the world. Nationalism instead of internationalism, with the slogan “America first” and the heavily propagated idea of a wall between the US and Mexico as a physical border that will once and for all stop the infiltration into the “pure” US nation have been ideas put at the forefront of the US political leadership. The slogan implies that the USA deserves power and wealth, including the wealth of others and the power to bully or punish – f.e. to impose tariffs, exit or threaten with exiting treaties (Lakoff & Duran 2018).

This view is a survival strategy for the “Strength” part of the dominant conservative metaphor. If all nations and all citizens of the world are equally important, then there is no discerning element which would emphasize the existence and well-being of one group over the other. Similarly, when Blair, the only scien-



tist in the film, realizes that the alien creature could infect the entire human population were it to escape the outpost, he destroys all manner of transportation and communication, effectively condemning the crew to death. The other team members punish him by locking him in a shed, even though his acts are motivated by scientific opinion and logic.

The xenomorph in *The Thing* only reaches full mimicry after a certain period of time – if it is discovered prior to full transformation, it can be revealed not only by “unfinished” body parts, but also by relative silence or unarticulated sounds and screams. The fact that the alien does not speak English until the completed metamorphosis shows the importance of mutual understanding through common language – the crew members can only suspect the intentions of the alien and speculate on the speed of assimilation were it to spread over the whole planet. Similarly, the English language is seen by conservatives as a common code and an important element of recognition among the members of the same group: hence the occurrences where Spanish- and other-speaking citizens in the US are unofficially regarded as second class citizens and are often perceived as illegal immigrants on American soil, despite their legal status and equal rights. Diversity of languages, appearances and experiences of the globalist approach diminishes the importance of one group over the other, which in turn destabilizes the fundamental hierarchical approach of the Republicans.

Frame 4. Make America Great Again/red color as a sign of identity:

- (7) *Look at all those red hats, Rick. Look at all those hats. That's a lot of hats.* (Donald Trump, campaign rally speech in Pennsylvania, March 2018. Retrieved from: <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-rally-saccone-pennsylvania-march-10-2018>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)
- (8) *A Blue Wave means Crime and Open Borders. A Red Wave means Safety and Strength!* (Donald Trump, Twitter status, August 2018. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1031852996567748613>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)
- (9) “@d_bunzz: @realDonaldTrump The donald looking good in the red tie on David letterman #VoteRed #2016” (Donald Trump, Twitter status – retweet, January 2015. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/553425476778487810>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)

An important visual emblem of the previous US presidency is the slogan “Make



America Great Again”, often seen printed in white lettering on red trucker hats worn by conservative supporters. Although American politics has always flirted with its inherently capitalist nature, the election results in 2016 ushered a new period in the comprehension of the political domain as a sales market. The symbolic properties of Trump merchandise are identified through the use of the well-established motto that rallies his voters into one coherent political body. Moreover, the color was not chosen arbitrarily, as red is considered the default color of the Republican party. Following the establishment of previously discussed frames, red is now also seen as the default color of “red-blooded” (as in ‘true’) Americans whose family values are in line with the dominant Republican ideology.

The hats are not the only clothing item that has risen prominently as a sign of conservatist recognition. Trump’s signature red tie has long dominated his visual language, and is almost always worn on significant occasions – from his inauguration to campaign rallies. In fact, this particular form and color of neckwear has figured as an exclamation mark of MAGA (acronym for “Make America Great Again”), and has effectively become another Republican entity in an aggressive discourse with the media, drawing attention in times of victory and defeat – for example, after a disappointing campaign event in Tulsa in 2020, where Trump was seen exiting the helicopter untied (Salazar 2017; Friedman 2020).

The parallel with *The Thing* runs through the conceptual metonymy RED FOR BLOOD and metaphor ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER. The exponential growth of paranoia among the crew members in *The Thing* is not caused by the rising number of deaths/alien mutations, but by the lack of discernible elements of categorization – once the xenomorph completes its transformation, there is no possibility of differentiation between human and alien organisms since even its blood mimics the color of human blood. By divising the blood test later on in the film, where heat (fire, heated coil wire) seems to harm the mutated cells, the crew members have latched onto bodily warmth as the only seemingly non-transferrable human trait,⁶ connected to the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER, since a strong and “angry” reaction from the creature is visible after the blood reacts to heat, thus exposing the human imitation among the real humans. The scenes where the alien creature does expose its nature through horrifying imagery of mutated flesh, indiscernible number of extremities and assimilating liquid bursting through its jaws are subliminal arguments for the protection of traditional

⁶ This trait is at least not completely transferrable. Also, it is unknown if other physical traits are mimicked by *The Thing*, implied by the enigmatic ending where one of the surviving characters seems to breathe in the cold air without visible exhales.



human values: the alien not only thinks differently than us, he also perverts the common and reassuring laws of nature with his monstrous appearance and thus deserves death. The use of the term *red-blooded* in phrases such as *red-blooded American* is not accidental: red is the salient perceptual property of the metonymy RED FOR BLOOD mentioned above, and by grouping one part of the electoral body in the category of human beings (as opposed to alien, whose properties are often differently marked in terms of skin color, bodily fluids, vessels etc.), this framing achieves two goals: only real Americans are humans/citizens worthy of their privileges, and only those who vote red (and wear the hats) are the real Americans. Therefore, liberals are beings untrue to their human nature and the US nation, and foolishly invite the Other into their ranks. Example (8) shows Trump directly connecting the “red wave” to strength, which, as we have seen in Lakoff’s models of morality, presents a foundation for the conservative model. When we take into account that American soldiers, seen as sons of the nation, spill their blood for the preservation of the American way of life (a talking point frequently used for the justification of military expenses), the color red takes on a highly symbolic value.

3.2. *They Live* (1988)⁷

Another adaptation of a short story,⁸ this time of “Eight O’Clock in the Morning” by Ray Nelson, *They Live* was filmed in 1988, at the height of late American capitalism and yuppie culture, and showed the dissipation of the American middle class. Overt political criticism makes this film a powerful visual testament to the dangers of corporate conservatism, and its often overlooked brilliance is slowly being recognized as a sign of a masterpiece (Rothkopf 2014).

The plot follows the main character named Nada, a down-on-his-luck blue collar worker from Detroit who moves to Los Angeles in search of a job and settles in a community of homeless people on the outskirts. Some of the people are gathered around a TV set and soon witness a man hacking the broadcast who warns about the government using a signal to enslave the population. In a nearby church, Nada discovers scientific paraphernalia along with stacks of cardboard boxes, and overhears a strange conversation between a street preacher and the hacker. At night, a police raid destroys the settlement and beats the resistance members, with Nada

⁷ The trailer for *They Live* retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLQ2d89vCiw>. Accessed: 30 August 2020.

⁸ As Carroll (1990: 2) notes, there has been a close relation between the horror film and horror literature, often mutually inspiring. However, in the case of *They Live*, the cinematic treatment represents a significant improvement of the original idea (Shultz 2017).



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narrowly escaping the seige. The next day, he retrieves one of the boxes from the church and finds it filled with sunglasses. When he puts the sunglasses on, the world suddenly turns into a black-and-white nightmare where billboard signs and newspapers, instead of their expected visual and textual content, show only a white background with simple subliminal messages in black ink, such as “OBEY”, “MARRY AND REPRODUCE”, “NO INDEPENDENT THOUGHT”, “WATCH TV”, “CONSUME”, “STAY ASLEEP”, with banknotes carrying a particularly powerful message “THIS IS YOUR GOD”. The lenses also allow Nada to see street masses overwhelmed by aliens with skull-like features who appear as humans to the ordinary eye. Shocked by this revelation, he gets into an altercation with two alien cops, storms a bank and shoots the aliens among the regular humans. When fellow construction worker Frank finds him returning to the alley where he found the box, Nada makes him wear the sunglasses to warn him about the alien occupation. Action-filled sequences lead the characters to an underground tunnel, from which they stumble upon a banquet where aliens are celebrating the destruction of the resistance movement together with their human collaborators, who are awarded for their loyalty with material success. Nada and Frank make their way into the main TV station which holds the alien-disguise signal, and before being shot down, Nada succeeds in destroying the antenna, making the aliens visible to the human populace.

While *The Thing* shows the initial stages of the alien spread, in *They Live*, the entire mankind is already infiltrated by lizard-looking aliens who appear to be ruling the world. The Otherness is masked via a strong television signal that blurs and transforms reality, so the regular, human citizens see and communicate with the aliens as their equals, or even superordinates. According to Grant (2004: 16):

...the aliens are monstrous only insofar as we recognise them as smart capitalists – they are, as one human collaborator explains, free enterprisers for whom the Earth is ‘just another developing planet. We’re their Third World.’ That the aliens pass for humans and live among us, as our wives and husbands, is a particularly trenchant comment about the thorough inhumanity of American capitalism.

The central metaphor of the film is among the fundamental ones: UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, helped by the metonymy (SUN)GLASSES FOR SIGHT. That the main character can only be made aware of the true nature of the capitalist society with a fashionable physical object is a comment on the American and Americanized global consumerist landscape. Without the sunglasses, citizens are, as the hacker of the resistance puts it, “in an artificially induced state of consciousness that resembles sleep”, thus rendering the main theme of the film to “the necessity to see through



the obfuscating gaze of dominant ideology” (Grant 2004: 16). In the first decades of the 21st century, and especially after the traumatic event of 9/11, consumerism in American culture became patriotism, and vice versa (Silberstein 2002: 107), which paints the characteristics of belonging to this nation as predominantly consumerist-driven. In short, the citizens are urged to listen to the ads and the billboards and act accordingly, which is at the core of the alien indoctrination in *They Live*.⁹

The main protagonist, although never specifically referenced in the film, is listed in the end credits as “Nada” (Spanish for ‘nothing’, a *nomen ist omen* by Carpenter), which is another subtle way for the director to point to the fall of the “American Dream”, as people affected by poverty, and people of color are often marginalized at workplaces and other areas of organization. According to Le Blanc and Odell (2011: 85), Nada represents the dream gone sour, his awakening to the world of *Them* a response to the repressive conservative policies that crippled creativity in the 1980s.

Wilson (2015) explored why *They Live* was explicitly made as an overt criticism of Reagan America. In a time when the country was ruled by a white, right-wing Republican who “favoured the rich, affiliated himself with neo-Christian morality and pitted America against a foreign nemesis, cultivating the notion that the nemesis would soon infect and annihilate America ideologically, economically and actually” (Wilson 2015:10), the author sees *They Live* as a cinematic forum where its audience could see their critique of the ruling party without explicitly voicing their discontent. Carpenter’s “reel politik” coerced Americans to face their fears evoked by the forces of an untrustworthy hypercapitalist government (Wilson 2015: 34).

They Live has outgrown its initial anti-Reagan framework and, in the decades after its release, provided a highly potent visual array of cultural symbolism. Wilson (2015: 95) argues that it represents an extrapolation of realities in the 80s as well as today, since the architectures of violence, systemic oppression and technological means have only grown in size and have been more aggressively televised since the proliferation of technology and mass media.

An unusual art installation by American artist Mitch O'Connell from 2017 is an example of the relevance of *They Live* in contemporary, highly radicalized times.

⁹ The black-and-white surroundings serve as a non-verbal metaphor on the appearance of reality versus the marketable present – the reality is bleak and does not satisfy the senses, while the alien-infiltrated broadcast seeks to appease the human eye and make subliminal messages more palatable.



Figure 1. Trump as the extraterrestrial politician from *They Live* with his slogan for the 2016 election, 2015 © Mitch O'Connell

By merging the characteristic features of the aliens in *They Live* (lack of human skin, blue tissue with red-purple muscles that mimic disease) and Donald Trump (Figure 1), the artist turned his visual hybrid into an artwork that evokes powerful frames of oppression and control. After several billboard companies in the US refused to place the artwork on their public spaces, a crowdfunding campaign enabled him to put the billboard in Mexico in 2017, as a sort of visual reminder of Trump's stigmatization of Mexicans (Gossett 2017).

The campaign was successfully resurrected in 2019 on US soil with slogans such as "OBEY" (where the use of one of the subliminal commands in *They Live* enhances his depiction as a villain, Leatherman 2020), and "VOTE" (Figure 2), which, in the artist's own words, works as a proactive message towards undecided voters (O'Connell 2019). Times Square and other public spaces where these artworks were shown to the American people (with the help of various crowdfunding actions) presented them not only as a recognition of the malicious intent behind the political façade, but also as an engine of the revivification of the liberal fight through democratic means of protest, using visualsapes to counter the controversial, "reality-show-style" rhetoric of the Republicans. *They Live* thus became an emblem of the political reality of Trump America, a mirror in which dictatorship could be identified and fought against – and the first step was exposing the true nature of the leader to awaken the population, similar to Nada's actions in the latter part of the film.

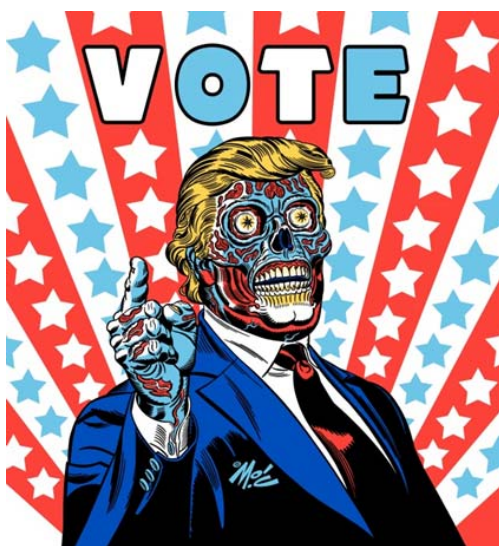


Figure 2. Update of the Trump/*They Live* artwork, featuring the word *Vote*, 2019 © Mitch O'Connell

Never before have messages been broadcast and available to millions upon millions of people as in the present day, which puts a yet unseen burden of responsibility on the shoulders of media outlets, who seem fascinated by the outbursts of the former US president. The potential of media and its ultimate corruption is discussed not only through the betrayal of Nada's ally, assistant director at the TV cable station where the alien signal is transmitted from, but by the vast multimedia resources (wristwatch mechanism, drones, etc.) used for the ultimate human control – this distortion and the pervasive power of the media that manufactures consent is a theme running through much of Carpenter's work (Grant 2004: 16).

The means of transmission of controversial Trump statements seems to be his official Twitter account, which has millions of followers worldwide and is often a direct line to the former president's reactions to national and world events. These highly polarizing statements (such as example 8) regularly draw attention from American and international media outlets, thus becoming effective tools in the hands of the former president. Therefore, Lakoff and Duran (2018) call for a media structure that adheres to strict journalist principles and avoids yielding to the propaganda machine, in an effort to neutralize the effect of Republican framing on the minds of the American media consumers.



The simple, yet powerful messages in *They Live* correspond to the simplified political rhetoric of the former American president via several rhetorical mechanisms:

Mechanism 1. Words as calls to action

- (10) *We are gonna win, win, win. We're going to win with military, we're going to win at the borders, we're going to win with trade, we're going to win at everything. And some of you are friends and you're going to call, and you're going to say, 'Mr. President, please, we can't take it anymore, we can't win anymore like this, Mr. President, you're driving us crazy, you're winning too much, please Mr. President, not so much, and I'm going to say I'm sorry, we're going to keep winning because we are going to make America great again.'* (Donald Trump National Rifle Association Convention speech, May 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/trump-gonna-win-so-much-people-will-say-we-cant-take-it-anymore>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)
- (11) *Without a Wall there cannot be safety and security at the Border or for the U.S.A. BUILD THE WALL AND CRIME WILL FALL!* (Donald Trump, Twitter status, January 2019. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1088430717611245571>. Accessed: 15 November 2020)

In the artificial world of *They Live*, the linguistic landscape of L.A. looks like an average metropolis with commercials, newspaper stands, and other points of content. However, with the special lens made by the anti-government resistance, the media canvases return to their form of visible conveyors of subliminal indoctrination. The same tactic, though entirely made public, has been successful for the Republican party nominee and his win in the US general election in 2016. Phrases such as *win, sad, great, build the wall, not good*, and other similar one- or two-word expressions have become characteristic of speeches given by Trump. The highly unusual use of simplified vocabulary and grammar, which had been deemed unbecoming a president or other individuals on high functions before, have now served Trump to paint him as being more straightforward and “honest” than his predecessors or opponents (Inzaurrealde 2017). The American average class, for the first time, has seen and heard someone who speaks just like them, and thus experienced a welcome change with the so-called “Trumptalk”, as opposed to politicians whose vocabulary and speech patterns do not correspond to their own. As Swaim (2015) noted: “Politicians in modern democracies just don’t talk this way”, and Trump has



used this to his benefit, cutting his verbal outings from an entirely different and captivating rhetorical cloth.

Mechanism 2. Repetition

- (12) ... *I love the concept — I love, love, love having a woman president. Can't be her. She's horrible. She's horrible.* (Donald Trump, campaign rally speech in South Carolina, December 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/the-buzz/article55604115.html>. 15 November 2020)
- (13) ... *and I have many women at high positions. I you know I've gotten a lot of credit for that, I mean I have so many women working for me and so many women in high positions working for me and I've gotten great credit for it.* (Donald Trump, interview for Face the Nation, August 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-i-will-be-phenomenal-to-the-women/>. 15 November 2020)

The messages in *They Live* are repeated in a print form or continuously transmitted via TV and other media, and they, as one character observes “keep us asleep, keep us selfish, keep us sedated”. The repetition of the words in the example above is employed to make the then-future president-elect open to the idea of a woman president (thus also pro woman rights), but at the same time, that the Democratic choice of Hillary Clinton would be a terrible choice for the country, and consequently, the voters. Speech sections in (3) and (10) can also be served as examples of anaphora used *ad infinitum* for these and similar tactics.

The notion of using repetition as a means of message conveyance is not new; politicians and advertisers alike have used this method to form and enhance the desired frame in the audience. However, in the era of Trump, the repeated words and phrases have taken on a simplified form that is easily remembered and amplified by characteristic speech patterns, placement and exclamations. Trumptalk, rather than being viewed as a harmless aberration, became another selling point of his candidacy (Lieberman 2015; Stevenson 2016; King 2017; Golshan 2017; Rossman 2017).

Press corporations, despite being labeled by Trump as disseminators of “fake news”, have at the same time been his greatest ally in winning the US presidency. As Lakoff and Duran (2018) argue, Trump used the fascination of the press with his most outrageous claims which it broadcast incessantly, and this allowed him to employ the press as a marketing agency for his ideas, which we can view as the result of the “car crash effect” or, as Carroll (1990: 177) sees it, the fascination with



anomalies – an event outside the norm that warrants immediate attention in spite of its negative content. The constant repetition of his catchphrases, disproven claims and general trail of thought in the media means he gains an audience of millions of people, whose frame-circuits are activated and made stronger with each repetition. In the end, enough repetition can make them permanent, thus molding their worldviews into those that align with the Republican mindset.

Mechanism 3. Hyperbole

- (14) *NAFTA was the worst trade deal in the history – it's like – the history of this country.* (Donald Trump, speech on trade, June 2016. Retrieved from: <http://time.com/4386335/donald-trump-trade-speech-transcript/>. 15 November 2020)
- (15) *Some of the best Economic Numbers our Country has ever experienced are happening right now. This is despite a Crooked and Demented Deep State, and a probably illegal Democrat/Fake News Media Partnership the likes of which the world has never seen. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!* (Donald Trump, Twitter status, 21 September 2019. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1175492022662287361>. 15 November 2020)

In the world pictured in *They Live*, there are no indirect phrases or euphemisms spread via subliminal means to the general, non-alien population. Instead, the instructions are clear, direct, and command submission. Similarly, the world of the previous US president does not allow any doubt in the messages: his way is the right one, the path of “winning“, while everything else, especially actions done by his predecessor, is deemed “bad“ or “the worst“ for the country. There are only two ends of a possible action in which you either win or lose, and as such are fundamental to the conservative thought – and “winning“ is the only positive outcome for Trump (Lakoff & Duran 2018). By using the interaction of the conceptual metaphors POLITICS IS A GAME and POLITICS IS A SHOW, the US president framed his political style as the “winning one“ and his campaign rallies as entertaining events for the public. This furthered the notion of American politics as a marketplace for commodities such as live entertainment.

Additionally, the MAGA slogan frequently used in his tweets and speeches (15) implied that the country had seen a radical decline in “greatness“, and that, by voting for him, the constituents can actively work on improving the state of the coun-



try and bring it to its former glory, even though it is not clear to what time period that state might refer.

4. Concluding remarks

The conservative vs. liberal political dualism in the US seems to build the foundation upon which many elements of American civilization rest, from politics to culture. In the contemporary media surroundings, it is practically impossible to disregard the prefixes “Democratic” and “Republican” in front of any issue or agenda linked to this country. At the root of the American political dissonance lie specific mental frames created and accessed via carefully constructed metaphorical expressions which, for the large part, mark the US political rhetoric.

Lakoff’s models of morality based on the elementary understanding of family, authority and care have been shown to be important in this regard. The “Strict Father” model is the basis of the conservative rhetoric, while the “Nurturant Parent” model underlies the liberal rhetoric. The political affiliation of American citizens depends on the quality they consider central to their worldview: strength (as part of the conservative moral concept) or nurturance (as part of the liberal moral concept).

Horror and politics operate on similar tenets of fear. Horror lies on the spectrum between the fear of the outside world and the fear of our own internal world, and politics often uses fear-based framing to disturb our emotional equilibrium. Time after time, horror films have served as a reflection of the political climate in which they were made. The current political chasm in the USA has had a serious ripple effect on the rest of the world, and the highly controversial rhetoric and the resulting divide could explain why the horror genre experienced a veritable Renaissance in the second decade of the 21st century.

Horror serves more than one purpose: next to catering to the audience’s emotions and allowing for the release of accumulated stress, it also serves as a medium for expressing contemporary social issues. In that regard, and building upon Carpenter’s dichotomy of fear, we can distinguish two elements of horror: Fear of Otherness and Fear of Oneself. Subsequent division into the conservative and liberal approach to these paradigms is linked to different belief systems and perceptions of threats. While the conservative approach perceives only the external evil, the liberal approach recognizes the possible existence of an evil within a community, or even our own bodies. These opposing views have motivated the themes of numerous horror films throughout the history of cinema, from which we focused on two highly regarded films from the 1980s: *The Thing* (1982) and *They Live* (1988),



both examples of the liberal interpretation of external and internal horrors.

In *The Thing* (1982), we recognized several framing devices shaping the dominant US political discourse: the division of citizens based on race and other characteristics, the “us vs. them” mentality, negation of national unity and coexistence, and the symbolism of the color red as the defining mark in the interplay of human against the perceived Other. The fundamental dissonance of the leading parties lies in their treatment of the Other: the liberals do not hold fort against the outsider and do not unify. This unity, on the other hand, is viewed by the conservatives as one of their strengths. By evoking fear of the foreign, the conservatives stir the voters’ emotions, which seems to be making them more successful in implementing policies that benefit their party and political agenda.

In a similar manner, *They Live* (1988) posits an alternative reality where the world has already been assimilated by the Other. The few humans who battle the well-established machinery have woken up from the consumerist slumber (perceived as sickness) and attempt to overthrow the media-supported apparatus. In reality, the modern media landscape represents a globalized forum of unprecedented dimensions and is utilized by the government to spread the leading ideology. In this sense, *They Live* offers a sharp critique of both the American society obsessed with consumerism, and the media conglomerates who spread oppressive government rhetoric. This powerful rhetoric builds on repetition and hyperbole and effectively serves to preserve the status quo. “DO NOT QUESTION AUTHORITY”, “CONSUME”, “OBEY” and other subliminal messages spread across the world of *Them* are mirrored in “hashtag friendly conservative truths”. Their simplified nature aims to point to the flawed perception of truth by liberals as the main point of difference between “real” people and those who do not conform to the ideal of controlled conservative citizenship.

Horror provides a vast repertory of symbols with which we can decode our fears. If our greatest fear is fear of the unknown, then the genre acts as a processing mechanism that allows us to demystify and discuss social matters of critical importance, such as race/nationality relations, mass media, global warming, human identity, and others. Contemporary public discourse, whether through pandemic analogies or billboard satire, has already benefited from revisiting *The Thing* and *They Live*. Our analysis suggests that such examinations can be beneficial for a better understanding of the political climate in the US.

The examples mentioned above are just some of the framing devices uncovered in the cinematic-political comparison of Carpenter’s two films and the globalized rhetoric of the United States. A more detailed analysis, spanning several seminal



works in horror and other genres, possibly also involving a diachronic dimension, would be necessary for a more in-depth treatment of the political rhetoric discussed in this study.

Nevertheless, our overview of the main horror paradigms and how they relate to US politics has shown that fear-based rhetoric has been (re)introduced as the central tool for political supremacy. For the contemporary audiences *The Thing* and *They Live* can ultimately be viewed not only as engaging cinema, but also as instruments for emotionally and intellectually processing current reality. In this sense, cult classics such as these should be regularly revisited and viewed anew.

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DRUGOST I POTROŠAČ: VANJSKI I UNUTARNJI HOROR KAO RETORIČKA SREDSTVA UOKVIRIVANJA NA VELIKOM EKRANU I U STVARNOM VREMENU

Cilj je rada analizirati glavne paradigme horor žanra i njihovih istovrijednosti u konzervativno-liberalnoj političkoj podjeli u Sjedinjenim Državama istraživanjem dominantne političke retorike i njenih specifičnih sredstava uokvirivanja koje se odražavaju u kinematografiji horora. Analiza se usredotočuje na dva upečatljiva celuloidna rada Johna Carpentera: *Stvor* (*The Thing* 1982.), i *Oni žive* (*They Live* 1988.), načinjena kao subverzivan komentar pažljivo isprepletene američke i globalne kulture straha i potrošačke kulture. Sredstva uokvirivanja uključuju podjelu građana na temelju rase i drugih značajki, mentalitet "mi protiv njih", poricanje (među)narodnog jedinstva i suživota, simbolizam crvene boje, te ponavljanje i hiperbolu. Kao snažni alati uvjeravanja u rukama političke elite, ova sredstva utječu na američke građane time što se pozivaju na njihova uvjerenja. Ova uvjerenja su zasnovana na modelima moralnosti (Lakoff 2002). Dualizam horora također je razmatran, tj. vanjski nasuprot unutarnjeg horora (Drugost izvan nas i stranac unutar nas u Ognjanović 2016), kao i način na koji binarna kvaliteta žanra informira i vodi filmska djela u istraživanju društva, posebice ona prožeta političkim i društvenim problemima. Stoga, rad istražuje zašto su dva analizirana filma važna za promišljanje o suvremenom američkom društvu, te mogućnost promatranja horor žanra kao prizme kroz koju se istražuju različite teme.

Ključne riječi: politički diskurs; retoričko sredstvo; uokvirivanje; horor; Drugost; potrošačka kultura; *Stvor* (1982.); *Oni žive* (1988.).